MEETING INFORMATION NEEDS IN HIGHER EDUCATION CAREERS ADVISORY SERVICES.

Thesis

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CAREERS ADVISORY SERVICES

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ABSTRACT

The thesis explores meeting information needs in Higher Education Careers Advisory Services.

Chapter 1 defines careers information and its place within the guidance process as described in the literature. The facilitative role of Advisory Services, their information needs and sources are discussed, together with graduate employment trends and employers' perceived recruitment needs.

Chapter 2 identifies the importance of targeting user-groups according to need, including minorities. The differences between help and self-help, declared and undeclared needs, are also investigated, together with the nature of careers materials and issues relating to provision. From the first two chapters possible research questions emerge, and ten questions considered appropriate for field research are identified.

Chapter 3 outlines the research methods adopted, and sounds cautionary notes.

Chapter 4 analyses the responses of twenty-four Careers Advisory Services to a questionnaire designed to obtain information preparatory to interviews with staff in four selected Services.

Chapter 5 discusses the findings of interviews with Careers Staff. Significant among them are the facility discrepancies between Universities and Polytechnics; the difficulty of determining whether those available are used to advantage; the limitations of information technology; the disregard of potentially influential external factors on career decision-making; blandness as a price of objectivity in careers information; the unsuitability of much careers literature; budgetary restrictions facing information officers; the varying receptivity of academic departments to Service initiatives; possible under-utilisation of information staff and their questionable status; differences in record systems and the sometimes unhelpful influence of the media.

Chapter 6 proposes that: information be more integrated to Service provision; careers literature appeal to a wider range of personal values; students seek information more assiduously; employers use Services to gain knowledge relevant to recruitment, and Services continue and extend their self-scrutiny on information issues.

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

A Definition of Careers Information

The term 'information' is many-faceted, and, for the purposes of this investigation, it is important to establish what is to be understood by, or included in, careers information. If there is a pitfall here, it consists in drawing the boundaries too narrowly. Not only are there more sources and types of careers information than may at first be suspected, but materials or processes often otherwise categorized may fit within an acceptable definition. 'Careers' is itself a term requiring examination. Besides work, it embraces full or part-time study and training, as well as other life experiences promoting knowledge of, and facilitating entry to, chosen fields of endeavour. A 'career' may refer to a person's occupational history, or (as it is mainly to be understood in this investigation) a particular job or field of work. In either case, it is normally used in connection with work of a certain status, conferring in turn status upon those engaged in it. The credentials by which an occupation earns such regard are frequently neither obvious nor consistent. For example, it attaches to the traditional 'professions', such as law or medicine, where it may be associated with the real or supposed importance and dignity of the work itself, as well as its longevity. Some comparatively recently-established occupations, however, have quickly acquired prestige through working conditions, salary levels and promotion prospects frequently rivalling those of occupations with a longer pedigree. This is one reason for the considerable expansion, in recent years, of those jobs generally regarded as 'graduate-level'. The need to document these has led to an expansion in careers information.

It may prove convenient to divide careers information into two categories - materials and processes. Materials embrace all designated careers literature, from flimsy leaflets to hefty tomes, published by agents with no obvious vested interest in readers' subsequent actions. They also include publications likely to carry some bias, such as those issued by professional bodies and employers. Most of the material of both kinds is aimed at potential newcomers to specific occupations, or geared to employment generally. A third type of literature, rarely as precisely targeted, are newspaper and magazine articles and report documents, often useful indicators of trends in career-relevant areas. Reports are frequently scholarly and make use of substantial statistical data. Newspaper and magazine articles, while usually lively and readable, may reflect political and other biases, and in general must be treated more cautiously. Also falling within the 'materials' category are audio-visual ones. Television and radio programmes provide up-to-date information slickly presented, as do many audio and video cassettes, a selection of which is often available in Careers Advisory Services. The third major material source is computer facilities. These allow clients to peruse banks of stored information, selecting and printing-off according to their needs. However, while all students have access to printed careers materials, not all Careers Advisory Services provide the technical facilities mentioned.

Careers information processes involve acquisition and dissemination. They include talks by invited speakers, discussions intended to raise career awareness, the informational aspects of careers interviews, and contact with 'knowledgeable others', such as organization representatives or anyone else in a good position to enlighten. It is worth stressing the importance of 'outsiders' in information-gathering. Once in his final year of Higher Education, a student may have exhausted immediate

resources, and can make further decisions only in the light of information obtainable elsewhere. Because any such investigation may well have been prompted by the Careers Advisory Service, and findings subsequently evaluated there, it can be regarded as part of a coherent exercise.

Careers guidance is commonly understood as the process of eliciting relevant information from a client, establishing an agreed understanding of his position, and through discussion which may include imparting information and advice, arriving at a strategy by which he is to reach a major or minor career goal. It usually takes place on a one-to-one interview basis and may last from a few minutes to an hour or more.

If understood as awareness-raising, careers education can, like most forms of education, take place in various ways. In a formal context, it refers to any exercise designed to make students aware of aspects of the working world or of themselves likely to bear upon their career-related decisions. Unlike careers guidance, it is often done most successfully in groups, which permits exchange of ideas or impressions. The potential force of external influences, such as media messages or peer-group pressure, may cause difficulty in assessing the influence of formal careers education.

The three core elements of careers work - guidance, information and education - are rarely distinct in practice, and an occasional difficulty in defining careers information (at any level) lies in determining where or how it differs from careers education or careers literature. While we can confidently place purely factual material in the 'information' box, this is less easy with impressionistic material, analytical exercises or evaluations which refine raw facts into manageable concepts. Guidance refers to the process of discussion between adviser and interviewee, and it is a rare contact of this kind during

which no information is requested or offered. Nevertheless, information exchange may in this situation be subordinate to a larger awareness-raising. Both information and guidance partly constitute careers education, which, despite its seeming significance, has until recently barely featured as a goal for Higher Education Careers Advisory Services. Now, however, it appears to be being taken more seriously, with information seen as a necessary preliminary or accompaniment to it. However, even if it were possible to delineate precisely the relationship and relative significance of these core elements, a clear definition of careers information would not thereby be achieved. What counts as careers information also depends partly on the individual engaged in the career-search process. Basic facts may count as careers information to one person where only fine details would to another. Fresh material may also have to be recognised as such to be influential, which depends on the awareness and honesty of its recipient.

Careers Advisory Services in Higher Education

Universal acceptance with Higher Education of the need to provide help to students in their occupational search dates from about the mid-1960s. 'Help' has increasingly broadened in interpretation, and has for some years now been understood to mean assistance in identifying fields of endeavour rather than merely advertising vacancies likely to interest students. Research undertaken mainly in America but partly in Britain during the 1950s and 60s demonstrated the complexity of career decision-making (Ginzberg et al., 1951; Super, 1953; Hayes and Hopson, 1968). This, together with the expanded range of graduate

opportunities, necessitated both a streamlining of Careers Advisory Services, and a clearer theoretical underpinning to their activities. The essence of this was the promotion of awareness-raising and student self-help, with advisers occupying a facilitative rather than an instructive role. Typically, a Service offers a stock of information relevant to career decisions, a range of information sessions on particular careers, and individual guidance interviews by resident careers advisers, some (though by no means all) of whom are professionally qualified in this field. Those who are not usually have backgrounds in industry or Higher Education teaching or administration. Even in large Careers Advisory Services, advisers typically devote half or more of their working time to guidance interviews. This is suggested by interview schedules advertised to students, advisers' claims of being busy, and the average length of interview. In Services having only very few staff, interviews may be scheduled at half-hourly intervals; in larger ones, an hour may be allocated. All students in an institution are eligible to consult the Careers Advisory Service there, and many Services extend their welcome to graduates of the institution and graduates and undergraduates who have not studied there but live in the area. Wilder (1982) says that educational institutions have a moral obligation to assist students:

> An increasing number of educators contend that as an inherent responsibility colleges and universities must provide a wide range of services and programs designed to support the students' educational plans. Today academic advising and career guidance surface as central educational activities; colleges and universities that value the career-related needs of their students must develop strategies that will elevate the importance of academic and career advising.

While there is in theory no limit to the assistance which a Service may offer any particular student, resource constraints in most institutions encourage restrictions to this, and self-help

procedures are usually promoted. Stoney (1984) says:

> The guidance needs of many students, particularly those on specifically or broadly vocational courses can, with adequate provision and preparation of the students, be largely met through careers information services. Advisers are then free to cope with more fundamental careers problems.

Considerable discrepancies in student/adviser ratios exist between institutions. This is supported by Stoney (1984). While the extremes may be explained by largesse or economy, the middle ground may be accounted-for partly by the nature of the institutions themselves. Where a broad range of subjects is taught, many of them scholastic rather than obviously vocational, the need for guidance and information may be more keenly appreciated than in, say, a college the bulk of whose students are doing teacher-training. Even in cases such as the latter, however, caution must be exercised, since a degree in any discipline is passport to many graduate-level jobs, and occupational destination cannot be too readily presumed from field of study. Tarsh (1987), however, makes a noteworthy reservation:

> The output of new graduates, the 'supply', means that, as a minimum, it is necessary to distinguish graduates according to their specific degree subject and to their graduating 'sector' (University, Polytechnic or College of Higher Education). Both factors have repeatedly been shown to have separate and independent influences on graduate deployment.

He goes on:

> ... while some occupations do recruit widely, certain subjects may nevertheless give a competitive advantage.

It is regrettable that different levels of provision may mean students in some institutions receive inferior advice to their peers elsewhere. Even a cursory view of Careers Advisory Services suggests that Polytechnic rather than University students may be the losers.

Against this must be set the higher proportion of Polytechnic students taking vocational courses, who may be more confirmed in their career choice than their University counterparts, many of whose courses have no occupational slant.

Some Careers Advisory Services have tried to increase their efforts in careers education by forming links with faculties and departments, running sessions designed to familiarise students with such as employer expectations regarding applications and interviews, and promoting students' self-awareness through computer-based questionnaires. Evidence of advisory service/faculty links are cited by Power (1976) in relation to Polytechnic of Central London careers sessions run for Business Studies students, mentioned in an article by Watts (1977). Watts also cites work by Brian Thorne with the Philosophy department at the University of East Anglia. This reflects a previously little-recognised fact that their academic strengths often bear little relation to students' self-awareness or careers knowledge. Delattre (1983) adds the criticism that many students fail to grasp the difference between a career and a succession of jobs, between professional and nonprofessional work, let alone prepare for, conduct or assess a career:

> The main reason for their limitations is that they have never been introduced to the kinds of studies in which one learns the methods for making such distinctions and reliably asking and answering such questions. All too many students are foreigners to their own language, or at least to its subtlety; their store of ideas about building and living a career is therefore impoverished, and they are rendered by their impoverishment especially susceptible to silly claims made by people inside and outside education about careers and career education.

Dibden (1981) laments another shortcoming in careers education:

> In the past, the assumptions of others that they knew their destinations left many students hesitant to admit their ignorance and gather the knowledge they needed to make a reasoned initial career choice. While the increased respectability of careers guidance in schools has probably increased the volume of traffic for Higher Education Careers Advisory Services, it has probably also lubricated the processes of information-seeking and guidance.

The Place of Careers Information within the Advisory System

Fredrickson (1984) says that:

> Careers information is probably the most under-utilised component of our vocational guidance programs. Counselors need to re-think the use of career information and make it an essential part of their work.

Fredrickson is American, but the British investigator Stoney (1984) supports this view:

> The importance of a well-stocked, well-run, attractively-presented and accessible careers information service cannot be over-stated since a) research findings suggest that the most frequently presented careers problems relate to a need for more information; b) careers information provides a unifying medium, which helps integrate careers counselling, careers education and related activities and c) where careers staff resources are limited, a carefully thought-out careers information service can form the basis for self-help strategies by clients.

Information fuels advice. Without information, the advisory process will quickly grind to a halt, and, in some cases, may not even, in any real sense, begin. In a careers context, however, it is important to distinguish two kinds of information, each essential to constructive analysis and eventual action. One is careers information

as already defined early in the Chapter; the other, information about the client. The latter may be biographical or attitudinal. Not all such information, however, will be significant to a person's career choice. A very important part of the careers adviser's role lies in acquiring personal information of potential bearing on career decision-making, and, with the client, coming to an understanding of the likely nature and extent of its effects, if any. Because personal considerations may limit or extend career choice more significantly than academic or experiential requirements, it is not uncommon for the provision of careers information as earlier defined to be subordinated to an establishment of these personal factors. Moreover, some theories of occupational choice suggest that careers information is of little or no use unless the recipient is in a state of readiness for it. King and Miller (1984) point out that:

> ... there are significant and sometimes traumatic psychological and physiological changes which occur normally at this age. In addition, and simultaneously, these young adults are students and as such need to meet academic standards and requirements which they perceive as a first priority. Unfortunately, though, the career decisions which must be made in the journey from first year to graduation will not wait, increasing the likelihood that students will be ill-prepared to make them and feel overwhelmed at these decision points.
>
> These realities have practical implications for providers of career services to this age group; not only in regard to the nature of services provided but also in the way in which they ought to be provided.

Though information about clients is important to careers advisers, giving information cannot be made conditional on its receipt. Nor does the typical client lay himself psychologically bare in the expectation of easy directions towards an appropriate occupation. The process is more gradual and oscillating than that, and the client is ultimately responsible for any decisions made. As Watts (1977) says:

> The skills required of the counsellor, in short, are primarily not diagnostic but facilitative, and are concerned less with the outcomes of decision-making than with its process ... they are focused not on helping students to make wise decisions (with the assumption that he knows what these should be), but on helping them to make decisions wisely.

He continues:

> The emergence of careers education can thus be seen as part of a more general change in the way careers guidance is conceived, in which the limited notions of information and advice are being supplemented - and to some extent overtaken - by the more sophisticated and demanding notions of counselling and careers education. Information and advice still have a part to play, but they are no longer regarded as sufficient or even perhaps as the central professional functions.

Personal information offered may be answered by factual careers information. The client may in turn react by expressing an attitude, offering more information, or asking the adviser to elaborate. This may go on for some time, client and adviser together approaching an understanding of the relevant issues and possible problems. In such instances, careers information acts as part of the elucidatory process, not just as a goal in itself.

While it is true that a proportion of students in most institutions are confused about career choice and require an adviser's help, the majority appear able to initiate some form of self-help. Acquiring knowledge via written material is perhaps the most obvious way of doing this, and for most students is likely to preface any personal consultation. Watts (1977), strikes a cautionary note, however:

> A careers guidance service based simply on making information available makes three assumptions, all of which are of questionable validity:
>
> a) that students are motivated to use the information;
> b) that they are capable of understanding it;
> c) that they are capable of relating it to their own needs.

Certainly, there are different ways to use information. Factual material may quickly provide the student with an opportunity map on which he can locate himself. This may determine whether further exploration would be purposeful, or whether other options should be examined. Impressionistic material, such as personal accounts, may be less obvious determinants, but partly because of this require more contemplation. It need not therefore be less impactful. An impressive representative may fire enthusiasm in a way written information fails to. A student's personal experience, if unhappy, however, may not be displaced by enticing work features and the glowing personal accounts of others. Students may usefully examine the separate effects of information delivered in different 'packages'. Doing this may reduce undue bias.

If few students consider information worth obtaining in advance, much advisory time may be spent conveying it. Points b) and c) mentioned above relate to the content of careers literature and the nature of careers education, both of which the careers adviser may find difficult to influence. A major function of information is, nevertheless, to sieve student needs to ensure that consultations use the time of both student and adviser purposefully. Stoney (1984) suggests that more emphasis should be placed on information and education, claiming that guidance interviews still appear to occupy a central role. She goes on to say that research findings suggest that the most frequent student career problems relate to a need for more information. King and Miller (1984) cast further doubt on the guidance interview as the best vehicle for this because some students resort to it for psychological bolstering primarily:

> A one-to-one relationship with a concerned adult professional is often what they request because it mirrors their recent family experience. Only by

> using this new relationship to change their perceptions of 'adults as parents' to 'adults as mentors' can students begin to evaluate their options and make decisions separate from and free of parent or peer pressures.

The value of such bolstering should not be underestimated. Attention has already been drawn to the importance of students' receptivity to careers information for this to be of any value. If discussion with an adviser achieves an equilibrium which promotes this, then such contact seems useful. Nor need this diminish the skill element in what advisers do. The range of clients and spectrum of needs and ambitions are broad enough to necessitate considerable personal and professional skills to deal with them all.

Once emotional equilibrium has been achieved, the value of exploratory measures is emphasized elsewhere. Stumpf, Austin and Hartman (1984) point out that:

> Exploring the environment and oneself thoroughly to obtain career-relevant information is consistently recommended in the vocational counseling and career development literatures ... It is generally pointed that through environmental exploration and self-exploration individuals gather career-related information which they subsequently use to make career decisions. To the extent that the information acquired is both reasonably accurate and effectively used, individuals should attract and select more suitable job opportunities.

The same authors, however, sound a cautionary note:

> Some methods of exploration and sources of information are more likely to be valuable than others. For example, knowing how to explore and where to explore may result in a large amount of useful information with relatively little effort. Thus, it is important to examine not only the extent of the exploratory behaviors, but also the amount of career-relevant information acquired in the process.

Advisers, as well as students, have to acquire and use information

judiciously. It may, for instance, not be worth an adviser's while to memorise specific information already available to students via the careers library. Once discussion has led a student to consider a manageable range of occupations, the adviser, rather than offer the relevant information, may do better to show him how to acquire it. The adviser may do this as much in his own interests as in the student's. While no responsible careers adviser would withhold needed information, one acquiring an oracular reputation may be too readily consulted as a short-cut to knowledge. Information provision to individual clients may have to be tailored to the interests of the student body as a whole. The sheer quantity of available information may lead advisers to familiarise themselves only with material essential to the advisory process. Detailed knowledge of particular occupations is possible in Services where each adviser has responsibility for specific fields of work or study. It is tempting to consider any economy or streamlining an improvement. However, care must be taken to guard against useful activities being unduly pared-down or jettisoned along with wasteful ones. For example, students consulting staff for already-available information may profitably be discouraged, but not if this alienates some actual or potential clients altogether.

From the above, it is evident that information can precede, be part of, and follow careers advisory interviews. It therefore permeates the processes of careers education and guidance.

Careers Information Facilities

a) Accommodation

Stoney (1984), points out:

> The question of location is of prime importance in considering the usage made of careers information services ... A readily identifiable location for careers information was felt by a majority of careers advisers to be crucial to their work and some rated 'location' more highly than the nature of accommodation itself ...

The location of careers information resources within an institution is likely to significantly influence their use. In most Higher Education institutions, material of this kind is held on Careers Advisory Service premises. However, these may themselves be situated away from main student traffic routes, or, even when close to them, in less-than-obvious places, such as above ground-level. Willson (1981) makes some telling observations on this point:

> The location of the information service is crucial. Only the most highly-motivated or desperate student will seek out the service if it is situated in an inaccessible corner of the building. Ideally the site should be somewhere near the main student traffic flow ... Whatever the focal point the careers service will attract many more casual users, because of its proximity, than would otherwise be the case ... It is obvious that wherever the information service is located it needs to be identified by a clear and unambiguous notice. The benefits of a prime location can be lost if the door appears to lead to a broom cupboard or a staircase.

The split sites of some institutions invite duplicated information services which are not always provided. When careers information is housed in a much-frequented place, such as the main library, its space allocation may be restricted, while its distinctive cataloguing code may confuse library staff. For these reasons, it is important that

careers information is a) conveniently located, b) duplicated where necessary, c) looked after by people who understand it, and d) well-advertised.

Finally, the information area has to be welcoming, comfortable and comprehensible to users. Carpetless floors, rickety chairs and obscure signs are unlikely to promote such an impression. Investment in decent furnishings, cheerful colours and appropriate storage and display facilities such as shelving will help create a pleasing first impression which encourages users to stay. It should be remembered that many users are casual callers, perhaps inquisitive rather than committed. Enticing them in for a short visit may 'convert' them, to their own benefit and the increased credibility of the Service.

b) Staffing

Staffing is important in good careers information provision. One reason for this is that materials require maintenance. Daily usage creates a measure of disorder, so regular tidying-up is necessary to ensure items can be found. Careers literature is voluminous, and new material must be introduced regularly, and the old expelled. The introductory process itself usually entails more than just placing items on shelves, and stamping, coding and cataloguing can be time-consuming. A member of staff should also be present whenever the information room is open. This is because loans may have to be recorded, enquiries answered, and discouragement offered to the light-fingered. Unfortunately, financial constraints prevent some Advisory Services appointing staff solely for these or related functions.

Consequently, access to information is restricted, or advisers have to take turns to fulfil these duties, or enquiries go unanswered and stock disappears. Perhaps the ideal is to have a full-time member of staff qualified in information or careers work appointed to deal with all information matters. This would benefit not only students, but advisers too, whose attention could be drawn to new materials or information matters possibly otherwise overlooked.

c) Literature

A Higher Education careers library's stock has to satisfy three main student client-groups. One constitutes students very uncertain what they will do after graduation; another embraces those with some idea but still needing basic information; the third, those having done considerable background work, and close to defining exact plans. Reasonably to hope to meet the needs of most members of each group, the careers library must stock information suitable for browsing and offering introductory information on a wide range of job and study options. It should offer fairly detailed information on specific occupations or occupational areas, showing training schemes, qualification routes, and job opportunity structure. Material showing how to begin career exploration should also be available. These may be tailored to the Service's total provision. Finally, detailed material, such as case studies of specific jobs, graduate entry statistics and information on opportunities within particular organizations, should be provided.

To satisfy all these requirements, careers libraries rely on three main sources. One is the Association of Graduate Careers

Advisory Services (AGCAS) (Raban, 1981), which publishes, among other things, a range of several dozen booklets providing detailed introductions to many graduate careers. Another source is professional bodies and employers, whose material is especially helpful in directing students towards particular localities, and specific levels of work and training. Often, there is less evidence in Higher Education Careers Advisory Services of the range of information sources observable in local education authority Careers Services. One reason is that many publications are plundered for their most relevant contents, and these extracts are then placed in the relevant occupational files. This allows students to spend less time seeking written information. It also permits additions or subtractions to be made instead of retaining or discarding entire items. Files covering organisations are sometimes compiled in the same way. The third main source is Careers Advisory Services themselves. Many produce in-house material which for two reasons can be very useful. Firstly, it can be written in response to specific demands, or to fill identified gaps in existing provision. Secondly, it can capitalise on the experience of its own recent graduates, some of whom may be prevailed upon to give written accounts of their work, study or training experiences. In-house material can also promote the Service's identity and convey a sense of coherence. In addition to the three main sources, particular publishers produce several large reference items. The best-known of these are 'Graduate Opportunities' (Newpoint), 'The Directory of Opportunities for Graduates' (Newpoint), 'Graduate Employment and Training' (Careers Research and Advisory Centre), 'The Register of Graduate Employment and Training' (Careers Service Unit), 'Postgraduate Opportunities' (Newpoint), and 'The Job Book' (Careers Research and Advisory Centre). With the exception of the last, these are referred to as GO, DOG, GET, ROGET and POGO. These volumes contain a lot of information. However, most of them have two

disadvantages: anyone seriously interested in working or studying at any of the organisations or institutions featured would need more information; secondly, the books are too expensive for any Service to be likely to stock more than one or two of each, however high the demand. The time a student would need to purposefully peruse any of them seems likely to exacerbate the problem.

Advertising jobs is not the main function of Careers Advisory Services. However, local and national graduate vacancies are notified to students through them, often via a fortnightly bulletin. A good application and favourable interview are often as significant in getting a job as targeting a particular line of work. Accordingly, handouts and sometimes books covering application and interview techniques are made available. The importance of such help should not be underestimated. The only previous interview an applicant may have had is the one for a place on his present course. Saying what they want to do and what they can offer an employer may not come easily to many.

Just as many sixth-formers take a year off before entering Higher Education, many graduates spend a year engaged in travel, voluntary work or non-graduate level employment. This may be to obtain a rest, or to broaden their experience, possibly trying out a field of work they are considering as a career. These often very constructive activities should not be overlooked, and Advisory Services usually provide publications as aids to engaging in them.

For aspirants to vocational or academic postgraduate study, compendia covering such opportunities are normally available. So is information on financial assistance for them, sometimes in the same publications. Training opportunities, with advice on how to apply, are provided in separate publications, often distributed by the relevant professional body.

d) Technology

Miller, Karriker and Springer (1986) point out that:

> The computer age has brought about a rapid increase in the development and use of self-administered, computer-based career guidance systems during the last few years. Although the use of computer-based systems has been found to be most beneficial to the user when integrated with counselor intervention and consultation (Sampson and Stripling, 1979), computer systems themselves show great promise and are viewed as highly beneficial in career guidance.

This is reinforced by the view of Stoney (1984) that:

> The careers information service in the late 'eighties is likely to take a radically different form from the rows of racking and piles of pamphlets and texts which currently exist. Computer terminals, which provide clients with interactive guidance and information-retrieval facilities, are likely to become a normal feature of the services and will help reduce client demand for lengthy one-to-one interviews. Video equipment will be able to provide individuals and groups with a wide selection of professional as well as home-produced careers education programmes.

These authors' predictions for the role of technology now seem optimistic. Existing computer facilities are limited, but of three kinds. One is the user-friendly database of occupational information similar to that already available in print. This material may be perused on-screen, and printed if desired. Another kind is vacancy information, available via a visual display unit. As yet this appears available in only a few Services, though positive reports from these may lead to widespread adoption. The third computer facility is designed for use by or with students who have yet to decide their career preferences.

An example of this third facility is called CASCAID-HE (Careers Advisory Service Computer Aid - Higher Education), produced by Leicestershire County Council in 1985, and widely used in Higher Education

institutions in Britain. This system matches information which the student offers about himself with stored occupational information. Because the computer cannot take into account elements particularly influential to choice, such as personality and social factors, the facility is used most successfully when its results are analysed in an interview setting. The format is as follows: the student gives responses to a fifty-four item questionnaire designed to elicit feelings about various aspects of work, on a five-point scale, ranging from 'like very much' to 'dislike very much'. The student may accord special weight to any of the fifty-four responses which he considers particularly significant to job choice. The responses on the questionnaire are assessed in relation to a 'bank' of almost two hundred careers, the 'content' of each being composed of a number of those work features comprising the questionnaire. The 'scanning' procedure results in a printout divided into two categories, with good job matches in one list and fair ones in another. The facility also allows a student to examine his responses in relation to any occupation within the bank. This is very useful, since it shows why selections have or have not been made, and may considerably expand students' knowledge of what particular jobs actually involve. The whole process normally takes at least a few days, since typically there is only one database for each system. The printout is often discussed with a careers adviser.

Paul and Alberta (1989) cite two advantages of computers in a careers library. One is that a database enables the easy access of material which can be buried in publications whose titles or format do not suggest its inclusion. Another is the usefulness of print-outs in listing relevant resources. Smith (1983) cites one system's help in eliminating the intimidation users often felt when faced with a card-index system, and in the reduced pressure on advisers, who no longer had to be familiar with all information held. However, computers

should not be seen as a total solution to information problems. Paul and Alberta say that they should not mask the limits to self-help in information-seeking, while Miller, Karriker and Springer (1986) urge caution in their adoption. They warn:

> According to user ratings, the most positive attribute of computer systems is, at least for now, that they are fun to use. If the fun begins to wear off, the effect on how the systems will be perceived on other attributes could be a general lowering of their ratings also.

In this section, the photocopier should not be underestimated. Having one removes the need for numerous copies of many items. It also enables students to take away material to read at their convenience, and allows reference items to remain in the library. The photocopier allows advisers to provide very specific information quickly where relying on a student to find it is unwise. It is a valuable piece of equipment in any Service.

Many Services stock a wide range of video recordings. The producers range from government departments to employing and training organisations. Video equipment is also useful as an educational tool in, for example, recording mock interviews.

Other Information Sources

Though Careers Advisory Services provide the most obvious informational ports of call for students, they are not the only ones. Sadly, too great a reliance on Services is observable in students' information-seeking. Much specific and even 'insider' information may be available from any of the following sources.

Among the most obvious contacts are academic staff. Those teaching in vocationally-related fields, such as law, business studies or the sciences, are potential mines of information, particularly if previously employed in industry or commerce. Staff must take care not to relate obsolete careers information. However, most seem aware of current training and academic requirements in their own field, which can in any case be checked through the literature or professional bodies. Academic staff are perhaps most useful in pointing out pitfalls, suggesting as yet unconsidered activities, and advocating contact with particular organisations or people.

Organisations are worth contacting. They offer abundant written material on organisational structure and job opportunities. Arranging a visit, however, provides a chance to see work premises and to put questions to staff. 'Hard' information may not be the only benefit. Contact may sharpen the student's sense of employer expectations, and how to cope with them. A visit also provides a way of becoming known, and of showing initiative. While it will be a lucky student who is offered a job on the strength of this alone, the direct approach does seem likely to enhance the prospects of presentable, interested enquirers. It is therefore surprising that it is not resorted to more often. Gordon (1983) says:

> A number of employers made the same point. The fact that so many new graduate recruits have unrealistic aspirations and expectations of industry and commerce might be somewhat ameliorated if more attention were given to this issue.

Gordon quotes one employer as saying:

> I think one point is worth making, and that is the lack of in-depth consideration most undergraduates put into their career selection. In interview this soon becomes apparent and loses more good young men and women further consideration than almost any other factor.

If a careers education programme does not include the opportunity to meet recent graduates, this may be arranged by contacting appropriate employers, or graduates directly. The first year of employment can significantly affect views held during student days. Such encounters can be helpful not only in occupational terms, but in learning what psychological adjustments may be necessary on entering work, whether a salary will meet likely needs, and any possible work intrusions on nominally free time.

The usefulness of professional associations and confederations should not be forgotten. Advisers themselves might profitably be perceived as information sources, in the sense of having their own stories to tell, and impressions to give.

Graduate Employment

Perennially, the figures for graduate employment in England are healthier than those representing the population as a whole. So says the 'Labour Market Quarterly Report', May, 1990, published by the Training Agency, and drawn from the Employment Department Labour Force Survey. Since 1955, Universities (and, since about the mid-1970s, Polytechnics) have, through their Careers Advisory Services, compiled employment statistics on their graduates, both those gaining first and higher degrees. The deadline for collecting this data is 31st December following award of the degree. In effect, the survey embraces anyone gaining a job up to roughly six months after most have graduated. The figures are actually called 'first destination statistics', an appropriately broad term, since they include both graduates entering work, and those remaining in the education system.

The process results in a snapshot picture of graduate employment and training rather than an ongoing one. Gregson and Taylor (1987), however, point out that statistics compiled a year after graduation would be much more representative. Their Graduate Employment and Training Survey assessed destinations for one year's graduates in this way. In it they say:

> ... 1,818 graduates out of the total sample of 3,660 were recorded as being unemployed at the time of the FD Survey. Replies to the GET Survey by these 1,818 graduates indicate that 1,266 obtained employment and 223 proceeded to further education or training. Only 16 per cent of those originally unemployed remained in the unemployment category by the time of the GET Survey.

Nevertheless, there are each year graduates wanting jobs who cannot find them, and employers seeking graduates who cannot get them. Why does this happen? There are several contributory reasons. Firstly, few employers are so desperate to recruit graduates that they will adhere to this policy when able to select only from unsuitable applicants - they prefer to wait for better material. Secondly, students often fail to spread their applications sufficiently. Many apply to prestigious organisations to the exclusion of smaller ones with which they might have worked and trained to mutual advantage. By the time the 'big boys' have recruited (and rejected them in the process), some applicants may have lost heart, changed their occupational targets, or accepted relatively directionless work. Thirdly, some students set their sights too high, or focus their attention on exclusive occupations, in both instances limiting their chances of acceptance. Gordon (1983) points this out:

> The two most important criticisms levelled at new graduate recruits across all subject disciplines were that they lacked industrial and commercial experience, and that they had unrealistic expectations of career development.

Fourthly, some students are, often for good reasons, unwilling to seek work outside the area they live in. If the work they seek is unavailable in that locality, they will have problems. Fifthly, some students enjoy an extended holiday after graduation which may, intentionally or otherwise, amount to a year off. Sixthly, some students who are competent scholars, and potentially good employees, fail to impress at the selection stage, possibly owing to shyness or some other personality trait, or to negligence during testing procedures or in completing application forms. Two groups of students fall into the final category. This includes those not interested in finding work, and those unable to through no fault of their own, such as the physically handicapped.

Boys (1984) believes that some undergraduates expect to be unemployed, and wonders whether this number might be reduced if they were better-informed. Parsons (1985) indicates that comparatively little is known about graduates after they enter work. He claims that first-destination statistics are poor indicators of trends, since they include placements representing underemployment or temporary occupancy. The Institute of Manpower Studies survey cited by Parsons indicates that just over half of all graduate recruits in 1984 entered firms having an annual intake of a hundred or more graduates. The same survey shows that 58% of graduates recruited in 1980 were with the same organisation five years later. Smaller firms appeared to have lower retention rates than large ones. However, for the first, second and third years after graduation, the smaller firms retained a higher proportion than the others. Parsons suggests that a high level of job satisfaction is enjoyed early on by graduates with smaller employers. He goes on to say that early career movement seems to be associated with unmet expectations, and that retention problems may relate not to

dissatisfaction, but to booming opportunity, or the need to acquire varied experience in order to progress.

Perhaps University and Polytechnic Careers Advisory Services should keep in touch with alumni for longer. Most seem content to complete a fairly full picture of graduate destinations for the previous year. Granting that surveys of three, five or more years after graduation would require considerable work, the results might yield a great deal of informative material on graduate movement likely to influence Service practices.

What do employers want of graduates? Why do they seek them at all? Stumpf, Austin and Hartman (1984) say that:

> Research on recruiters' views of the characteristics of effective interviews include: the interviewee "knowing what he/she wanted" and having "well-thought-out career interests".

Gordon (1983) quotes one employer's list of the positive characteristics of graduates:

1) Ability to learn quickly in a 'pressure' situation.
2) Developed intellectual abilities.
3) A degree of maturity.
4) Most have had some work experience.
5) More developed personality.

Intellectual abilities and work experience can be gauged at the selection stage, though how much they will contribute to meeting job requirements must remain uncertain. The other three qualities mentioned seem hard to judge outside the workplace. Their being cited, however, suggests that employers can assess them, or think they can. Even if the assessment methods work, the question of whether non-graduates subjected to the same tests would perform as well is left open. By limiting candidacy, some employers may distort the apparent success of their selection procedures.

The question remains, however, of whether graduate destination statistics mislead as to the need for degree-level qualifications in certain occupational fields. Dibden and Tomlinson (1981) pose an argument for an extensive careers education programme in Higher Education. They say that there is:

> ... a very strong case indeed to be made for the provision of formal careers education in schools, universities, polytechnics and other institutions in the higher education sector and for a regular place to be found for this in various curricula.

Delattre (1983) goes further. He challenges the notion of career goals in the narrow terms many students seem to consider them:

> Such students are not likely to learn how to determine the degree of success of a career. They are likely to think of success in the most irrelevant terms - job advancement and monetary compensation - rather than in terms of the most relevant criteria, specifically the extent to which the goals of the work are achieved and the controllable obstacles to their achievement are overcome.

It is evident that the provision and consumption of careers information in Higher Education are far from simple. The purpose of this chapter has been to define careers information, illustrate its various forms, and depict the educational and guidance landscape in which they feature. It has also attempted to show information against the larger background of work and training, and to take account of the perspectives of not only advisers and students, but also of the organisations which are, respectively, their contacts and potential employers.

Chapter 2 now explores some of the issues.

CHAPTER 2

THE ISSUES

The topics identified as worthy of consideration in this chapter have been derived from three sources. One is the Introduction, another is the literature on Higher Education careers advisory practices, graduate recruitment and information provision, and the third is particular features or practices themselves, which, by their nature, invite certain questions. Specific areas meriting detailed exploration may pertain to psychological factors or to guidance procedures. These are worth mentioning, since they indicate how far information matters influence career choice at this level. Accordingly, some of what is said in this chapter relates to existing research, while some poses questions which those interested in obtaining or providing good careers information should be asking, and attempting to answer.

The Clients - Actual and Potential

> When the Inner London Education Authority was investigating the needs of its potential clients, prior to setting up institution-based careers services in the polytechnics in 1971, it was discovered that 25% of the students were over the age of twenty-five. This unexpected skew in the age distribution meant that the kind of material ordered needed to be relevant to people who already had several years of work experience as well as being appropriate to new entrants to jobs and careers. So the first lesson is not to make assumptions but collect the data at first hand.
>
> (Willson, 1981)

A question which can fittingly be asked in advance and retrospectively is 'who uses information?' The size and nature of an institution will determine the numbers, ages and scholastic disciplines

of potential information-seekers. It may also indicate possibly (though not necessarily) influential factors, such as the student male/female ratio. Any new approach to or revision of careers information practices should take into account aspects like these in determining what information provision should be, and what part it should play given the resources available (or likely to be allocated) for careers guidance and education. Information need not rely on staff being steeped in the love of their own institution. Responsibility for information may, however, be lubricated by institutional background knowledge. For instance, knowing which faculty members might offer students detailed occupational information, might be helpful. This has an important bearing on the selection and availability of information materials or facilities.

Retrospective client assessment can be still more helpful in pinpointing likely information needs. Even very simple analysis can be useful, such as counting the students consulting the Service or requesting information, and reducing this to patterns representing specific periods of time. This can be especially helpful in allocating staff resources for information purposes. So can the knowledge of what proportion of callers are self-help-oriented and what proportion request advice. Care has to be taken to devise a reliable recording process, to ensure precision, promote economy, and produce worthwhile data. Stoney warns of one potential danger of failing to undertake any such survey:

> A formal evaluation of students' careers information needs from different courses and groupings was, however, infrequently undertaken, with the likely result that the requirements of minority groups remained unidentified.

Assiduous efforts can establish levels and patterns of interest among students from particular years or courses. These can also establish

the levels of knowledge exhibited during discusssions or interviews. This is again important in targeting resources, particularly in deciding whether students should be encouraged to inform themselves, in order to conserve staff time. Stoney (1984) says that students tend not to undertake career planning until near the end of their courses, and that, because of resourcing problems, careers advisers focus their efforts on final-year students.

The students who contact their Careers Advisory Service for information identify those who don't. Many of the latter may give no cause for concern, particularly if their courses carry obvious employment or scholastic implications, though neither would justify complete disregard. Within any Careers Advisory Service, the absence of any identifiable category of student should be noted and acted-upon. Obvious examples might include postgraduates and handicapped students, and Stoney (1984) makes the point that information should cater for mature students, as well as the 18-22 year-olds, an observation reflecting that of Willson (1981) quoted earlier. Raban (1981) highlights the vulnerability of mature students when he says:

> Because of their age, employers may be reluctant to accept them, especially where a long training is involved.

Why non-users fail to utilise careers information is not easy to say. However, two techniques in particular may help determine this. One is to ask users how they were attracted to the Service. This may highlight good advertising strategy, as well as suggesting features which may be offputting. The other tactic is to quiz students to see whether their absence can be readily explained. This may be done via departmental liaison or questionnaire. Even a scant response may identify shortcomings which prejudice usage. A 'stitch in time' approach might be effected by Services focusing more effort on first and second-year

students. This might help inculcate habits of research and self-analysis likely to reduce the amount of 'crisis counselling' of final-year students. In a careers context, crisis counselling is virtually a contradiction in terms. Even the best information offered during it may come too late. Crisis counselling may assist in job-hunting, but not career choice.

A major issue in careers information provision must be periodic and thorough analysis of the client group, actual and potential. Examination of the nature, frequency and extent of this will be made later.

Clients' Needs

Clients' information needs may be of two kinds - declared and undeclared. The former may in turn be split into needs which reflect accurate problem diagnosis, and those which do not. The latter may divide into those which are not pursued, and those pursued privately and possibly contrary to guidance and agreed action. Let us look first at declared needs.

Early in their communications with student clients, careers advisers have to assess the appropriateness of their clients' requests. Discounting any psychological or other problems which may be affecting decision-making, the adviser must determine whether a student needs information primarily, or a raised self-awareness in careers terms. Such awareness relates to personal factors or dispositions likely to influence decision-making, rather than factual information on jobs or training. Information itself provides the key to this, though, since, through questioning the student, the adviser can assess whether

occupational information alone is the answer. However, caution in the evaluation of self-awareness is advocated by Arnold and Masterson (1987):

> It seems that finding out about careers led to enhanced self-concept certainty, at least in the short-term. However, there was no evidence ... that high self-concept certainty led to perceived ability to make career decisions. In fact, there is considerable reason to suppose that it led to inflexibility, since those with more certain self-concepts became significantly less able to specify an alternative career choice over the study period, while the reverse trend occurred amongst those with less certain self-concepts.

This is a strong statement, and it is American. However, no British work appears yet to have reached a satisfactory formulation. Watts (1975) encapsulates the process and usefulness of career self-awareness when he speaks of:

> ... the skills and awareness that students need in order to integrate what they know of themselves with what they know of their opportunities, and in order to convert these two kinds of knowledge into an implementable decision.

Because no automatic screening precedes independent information-seeking, possibly many students who appear to be making progress via information sources are in fact going down blind alleys by exploring careers for which they are, in different ways and to varying degrees, unsuited. Given this possibility, an issue which should be addressed is how far students may be considered competent diagnosticians of their own career needs. Assessing this demands scrutiny not so much of the students as of those educative influences designed to promote career awareness and vocational maturity to which they have been subject.

Bachhuber (1988) says that students do not know how to use employer literature to advantage. Bihm and Winer (1983) feel that the client has a role in information exchange. However, they

highlight difficulties with this:

> Although researchers of career counselling cite the importance of occupational information (Hoppock, 1967; Osipow, 1973), no model has been proposed to systematically account for the way in which an individual will acquire, manipulate, store, retrieve, and subsequently use occupational information.

They go on to caution:

> Counselors engaged in relaying information about courses to clients might be cautious in assuming that all the information given in a counseling setting is retained perfectly and not modified in any way.

While careers advisers are doubtless pleased when clients prove not to need help with fundamental needs and values, they may be irked at having to provide information readily available in the careers library. Perhaps the ideal answer is to screen all students. However, time may be saved by advisers guarding against acting as information banks. Frequently, an hour is reserved for a student consultation. This is presumably to have enough time for what might arise. This may foster a belief on both sides that considerable information must be requested and offered. Shorter interview slots may encourage more judicious requests for, and offers of, information.

Undeclared needs are, almost by definition, less obvious, and likely to come to light only after some discussion. The careers adviser's job may not end at identifying these needs. He may also have to convince the client of the justice of the diagnosis, particularly if this appears at odds with the original request. Sometimes, there is little resistance, and even relief that the truth has emerged. Usually, however, this is not an unmasking exercise, but one in which adviser and student together approach a recognition of whatever information is really required.

Advisers can offer students three main types of information which

they may not otherwise consider important, or take time to investigate. One comprises potentially useful resources beyond the careers library or the institution itself. Another constitutes activities such as work experience, useful in preparation for a selected occupation. The other involves information on self-presentation, such as completing application forms and attending interviews. This last is particularly important, since many potential employees fail to gain desired appointments through not satisfactorily expressing their merits. Despite its importance, advisers cannot easily give the information potentially most helpful to some clients, since this may involve pinpointing shortcomings which they find hard to accept. Doubtless this on occasion relates to such as dress, gestures, speech and manners, features which, however they might disadvantage a student, advisers may be understandably reluctant to explore. However, the graduate recruitment literature makes no mention of this, implying that there is no significant waste of talent explained by overt failure to meet accepted standards. The shortcomings are more likely to concern students' beliefs that they are knowledgeable, well-prepared, even talented, as suggested by the employer Gordon (1983) quotes, cited earlier. Convincing some students that they lack these qualities may be as hard as telling others to clean their finger-nails. In general, students' initial self-exploration should perhaps be more basic than many self-awareness exercises suggest.

In behaving agreeably to clients in order best to help them, careers advisers sometimes find themselves consulted about matters beyond their own information resources or professional competence (Raban, 1981). They must be able to tell when information-seeking strays unduly from careers matters. Tact may be needed to suggest this without seeming dismissive, and the procedure be eased by the adviser directing the client towards help elsewhere. Stoney (1984)

cites overseas students as particularly prone to consult advisers about matters unrelated to careers.

Services to meet the information needs of specific student groups have recently been established. Handicapped students can now consult the Disabled Graduates Careers Information Service (DGCIS). Its unique database housing the employment experiences of many disabled employees, is based at Hereward College, Coventry, the national college for students suffering disabilities. The stored information covers a wide range of handicaps, and, encouragingly, much of the work gained has been in jobs traditionally done by able-bodied people. A major advantage of the system lies in its enabling people with a particular disability to contact similar others who have found work. Another is matching vacancies advertised as suitable for a disabled person with handicapped students seeking work. Because travelling is frequently a problem among its clients. DGCIS's association with the National Federation of Access Centres promotes local contacts to ensure that vacancies are advertised to as many of them as possible. Links have also been established with the Association of Disabled Professionals, and the office for students with disabilities at the Open University (Kaur, 1989).

The Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS) has set up a sub-committee to deal with the employment and training of older graduates (defined as twenty-five or over at the time of gaining first qualification). The survey detected considerable adverse prejudice to this group by employers, notably in the private sector. Even those with a declared open recruitment policy still often failed to consider applicants over the age of thirty. AGCAS is endeavouring to spread the message that persistent application is worthwhile, and that once an organisation begins to recruit older

applicants, others will, too. The Association of Graduate Recruiters Conference in 1989 discussed the implications of full graduate access to jobs.

Industry's continuing and growing need for graduates (O'Leary, 1988) seems certain to improve job prospects for mature graduates in the 1990s. The decline in entry to the labour market of graduates in their early twenties will mean more older appointees to graduate-level jobs. Assuming this proves unproblematic, the remaining prejudice against older applicants will probably be eliminated. Older graduates have as much to give as younger ones, and often more in terms of already-acquired skills, maturity, dedication and experience in a relevant field. Many of them have commitments which make them less disposed to job-hop than their younger counterparts. This will in turn reduce the amount of recruitment and training their employers have to do by way of replacement.

The prejudice against mature students is surprising (Haskel, 1989). Many are only in their late twenties or early thirties, young enough to make careers in most occupations. Possibly employers feel that they are harder to mould to a corporate image, or that they lack the vitality of younger applicants. If so, it would be interesting to know how much employer reluctance in this respect is founded on their own experience or on unexamined beliefs about mature students.

New information dissemination methods helpful to all students are being introduced. The Graduate Employer Matching register (GEM) is a computer system available at the University of London Careers Advisory Service. This matches graduates seeking specific kinds of work with appropriate vacancies. Many graduates thereby discover jobs which they would not otherwise have known about. Many employers also use GEM, knowing that by doing so they need consider only graduates

from whom they are likely to select. A pilot scheme, called Graduate Careerline, is being piloted from 1989 to 1990. This is a telephone advisory service introduced by AGCAS and staffed by careers advisers at Bristol University. It is promoted via vacancy lists circulated within Higher Education, through leaflets, and at Summer fairs.

As mentioned and discussed before, information-giving need not be separate from guidance. In the more advanced counselling interviews, the two become at times indistinguishable. First contacts between clients and advisers are more likely to draw demarcations. Stoney (1984) suggests that testing procedures might be helpful:

> ... careers counselling services have not in the past made great use of ability or personality tests or vocational interest questionnaires. Lack of training and knowledge of techniques as well as lack of time and finance have been the main constraining factors ... those instruments in common use, generally in counselling work with individuals, tend to be well-tried, often outmoded materials. Increased usage of vocational-interest questionnaires has, however, occurred recently because of the development of computerized marking of the questionnaires and matching of interests and attributes to data banks of job suggestions.

Information Selection

In Higher Education Careers Advisory Services, there are two main stages of information selection. One is by staff, who decide what information to make available to their clients; the other is by students, who presumably choose those items they think will best tell them what they want to know. Some types of careers information are more useful to advisers than clients, and vice-versa, while some are better suited to fulfilling particular functions. This is supported

by Pryor and Pincham (1986). As they also point out, each source of information has its strengths and weaknesses.

Two major questions arise from this: what criteria determine which publications the Service obtains, and why do students select the material they do? Regarding the first, Services may be restricted in what they can obtain. Finance seems a likely inhibitor, but there are others, such as limited opportunity to examine publications prior to purchase. Different Services, and the staff within them, have varying opinions of which information is worth acquiring. Even what is considered worthwhile must be seen in relation to how information is used before purchase can be justified. Regarding the second question, students may prefer to peruse attractively-packaged material to more substantial though less eye-catching publications. However, it is important to resist any temptation to view students as a homogeneous body. Like all groups of people, they are attracted by different things and have different ways of doing the same thing.

There may be a prevalent feeling among Careers advisory staff that students would feel insulted by simply-presented information and not resort to it. However, students can be as confused by quantitative, complex information as anyone. Usually, the questions they want to ask, at least initially, are basic (Raban, 1981). Bachhuber (1983) cites information overload as a problem.

Whether an item of information is studied in the depth it deserves depends partly on availability and demand. Care in selection is especially important with reference works. Most are produced by established publishers of careers material, though this alone does not guarantee suitability. Publishers to whom careers, or even reference works, are an unfamiliar province, may put attractiveness before content. Also worth exploring is the information balance within individual

publications. It may be tempting to judge them on their factual material. However, information can be 'soft' as well as 'hard' - that is, can include the psychological elements of a job as well as its constituent activities. Occupational material which omitted either would be of doubtful value.

What is the 'right' quantity or proportion of information depends on a publication's objectives. Introductory material should convey essentials, elaborating minimally if at all, since the reader probably wants to examine other material, too. Since most graduates can select from an array of occupations, this holds good for material aimed at them as for school-directed information. However, much careers information fails to direct itself at a particular audience. This may be deliberate, with a view to reaching the largest possible readership. From a consumer viewpoint, however, the absence of clearly-differentiated strata of information can cause time-wasting and confusion. As Raban (1981) says:

> The questions which undergraduate and postgraduate students ask about their futures differ little from those asked by anyone else who is trying to decide what to do - "What do I want to do?", "What am I able to do?", "Where can I do it?", or "How do I train for it?" The information which graduates and postgraduates need in order to answer these questions is, therefore, very similar to that needed by those with lower qualifications. Where it does differ, though, is in quantity and complexity because graduates often have a wider range of options to look at.

The possible differences in the quality of information is apparent in comparing the two following extracts. The first is taken from a graduate recruitment brochure for an internationally-known company.

> Your career in Industrial Finance will begin with training which will give you an unparalleled insight into how our business works - and ultimately into problem solving in management.

> An effective framework of financial planning and control is essential to profitability and success in all our business areas, and the financial managers responsible for these activities have a significant say in which direction the company moves. That's responsibility.
>
> What will we be looking for in our graduates to ensure that, in three or four years' time, they'll be well capable of taking significant steps up this ladder? You'll need to demonstrate basic business acumen; influencing skills; a marked desire to succeed and an ability to take a broad strategic view.
>
> We firmly believe that the only way to produce financially oriented business managers is to place you in an environment where contribution is essential both to your progress and ours. We're in a rapidly evolving and expanding business; keeping our finger firmly on the pulse of change is critical and the work in which you will be involved - right from day one - will play a vital part in its future.

The second is offered by an employer, but by way of general advice, and featured in a neutral careers publication, not promotional literature.

> Try to understand the company's style and then ask yourself whether there is a good psychological fit. Pick an organisation for how much it looks at people as individuals, with appropriately tailored training and assignments.
>
> Don't only consider 'will there be people there like me?' but 'will I be broadening my people and other skills? Will I have the opportunity to broaden my life experience and grow as a person?'
>
> How much support do you need? Could you cope on your own as the sole graduate trainee in a particular location, or would you prefer a network of peers?
>
> How might you relate to people within a large organisation?
>
> Consider the long as well as the short term. Think about the next but one job. Where might your first step lead?

The first passage seeks to impress, the second to analyse. The second poses in a general way the questions which the first should be seeking to answer specifically. The orientation of the

second is geared to considered career-decisions where the first appeals to superficial, impressionistic judgement. There seem considerable risks in relying only upon careers literature resembling the first excerpt.

Detailed information may so dominate a careers library that basic material on how to choose a career goes unnoticed. The argument that it can be requested lacks substance, since students may hesitate to ask. This opens a broader issue - the extent to which library materials encourage a limited clientele. When information selection and display suggest this, students, albeit a minority, may be alienated. Presumptions about groups may be equally damaging. A careers library which fails to recognise that postgraduate students may wish to enter an occupation unrelated to their study, or that mature or handicapped students may wish to do postgraduate work, is failing some of its clients. A major presumption seems to be that nearly all graduates want to enter graduate-level posts immediately. This seems shakily-founded, given how many graduates do ordinary jobs, sometimes for years, before training or studying for long-term occupations. Perhaps careers information should more accurately reflect graduate first destinations.

Selection denotes inclusion, but implies exclusion. Things can be 'selected out'. This sense of selection is important in respect of information, largely because of the pace of change in life generally, which is reflected in work. During the past fifteen years alone, large numbers of vacancies have appeared for jobs which did not even exist five years before that. The economic instability of the same period, bringing many unemployed with time on their hands, and many with higher disposable incomes than before, has, for example, contributed to the boom in the leisure industry. This has increased

the need not just for sports attendants, but workers in sports goods manufacture, marketing and advertising, retail, coaching and instruction, among others. This need has in turn influenced recruitment practices, qualification demands and selection methods. Careers information covering such fields increasingly risks being unreliable with age, and must be revised regularly. A publication's shelf-life varies with influences acting on the field it covers. Obsolescence appears the prime reason for expelling material. However, information which remains current and none the worse for wear may be jettisoned if its style or graphics become dated.

This still leaves careers information staff with several things to decide. One is whether to review stock regularly or on a rolling basis. Periodic review is better for some kinds of information, notably reference works and annually-published material in general. Annual review may likewise be adequate for other items, particularly if replacements arrive at about the same time of year. However, there are two good reasons for a rolling review. One is ensuring detection of any gaps in provision; the other is to spread out the task. Gradual review carries the disadvantage of having to be done partly during periods of usage, while the concentrated approach may be undertaken during slack periods or even vacations. Not all discarded items deserve replacement. Any rarely consulted, or which duplicate information, are candidates for this category. It is vital that staff responsible for careers information recognize the importance of stock surveillance in formulating and implementing acquisition and replacement strategy.

Staff Information Needs

Pryor and Pincham (1986) provoke debate when they say:

> Fredrickson (1984) recently concluded that occupational information is the most underused resource of the career counselor.

Higher Education careers advisers need three kinds of knowledge - familiarity with careers library stock, acquaintance with useful resources beyond the careers library, and whatever facts they need at their fingertips to interview clients. For the adviser, knowing where to find information is therefore as, if not more, important than memorising it. The sheer quantity of careers information published makes complete mastery impossible, and even the idea that it might be, counter-productive and possibly dangerous. This holds good even when an adviser is responsible only for one category of student or occupational field. New staff may take comfort from the likelihood that answering queries daily will in time build a knowledge sufficient to most demands. Deeper familiarity will, however, depend on time spent noting and evaluating library stock. Short-cuts to completing some information tasks might be taken through training. According to Stoney (1984):

> ... HE careers advisers are generally trained specialists who have been directly appointed to full-time (or at least half-time) careers posts.

Encouragingly, this suggests that expertise is valued, and that efforts will be made to sustain it. The training which information staff have had for this will be examined later.

Advisers also need information about their student clients. Mostly, only the sketchiest details appear to be gathered in advance of interviews. Of course, personal information can be acquired during discussion. However, advisers and clients would probably sometimes

benefit from key biographical information, or the precise nature of an enquiry, being known in advance, possibly permitting useful preparation. This may be more true of some client groups than others. Students whose courses familiarise them with occupationally-relevant knowledge, and whose tutors have industrial experience, seem more likely to demand of advisers more specific information than students of purely academic subjects. Staff's knowledge needs may therefore vary with the academic group or occupational field for which they are responsible.

Many advisers, however, are jacks-of-all-trades, for whom even informal information exchanges with colleagues are precious. Such unscheduled contacts, however, may result in valuable knowledge bypassing some. Information exchange is therefore better formalised. This facilitates broadcast and permits discussion of information matters. Valuable potential contributors to such exchanges are information staff possibly lacking an advisory role. They are typically at the 'coal face' of information acquisition and distribution, and in a good position to comment on the use of materials. Advisors should be ready to note information staff's views, since these may offer insights into client behaviour of which they are ignorant. Such insights may lead to improved interview procedures. Conversely, information staff must be aware of students' feelings and interests expressed in interviews, in order to best select and treat information. The Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services' magazine, 'Phoenix', provides a good forum for issues affecting professional practice.

Despite the above, Services should hesitate to formalise 'ad hoc' procedures which work satisfactorily. Informality allows scope and variety according to real needs. Formality tends to stipulate requirements possibly unsuited to the situation.

A final issue worth exploring under this heading is the relative status of advisory and information staff. The latter, as well as the former, play a significant part in students finding congenial destinations. Comparative salary levels and training opportunities, however, suggest that information staff are seen (by their employers if not their adviser colleagues) as second-class citizens. This calls into question the status of information work itself and whether it should be classed an ancillary or a professional activity.

Careers Service/Departmental Liaison

Stoney (1984) says that there is a need for outreach and awareness-raising work by advisers, which would help students to better utilise advisers' time. Watts (1977) questions whether the phenomena of self-awareness, decision learning and transition learning can be embraced within the concept of information, or whether they are essentially educational. Even if the latter, argues Watts, this may be set down as a prerequisite to any careers information gathering. However, he sees more people in the 15-25 age group (defined by Super (1953) as the 'exploration' period) spending time in academic institutions, which he considers "dysfunctional for effective vocational exploration". Watts continues:

> In the first place, they usually do not regard providing for such exploration as any real part of their function: indeed, some regard it as hostile to their objectives (witness for instance the traditional academic antipathy to vacation work which is not course-related). Such exploration as is officially provided-for is in terms of academic subject-content, and even this is restricted in most institutions by specialised

> courses and limited opportunities for course transfer. Even when courses are vocational in nature, they frequently presuppose their vocational commitment on the part of the students, and do not provide the flexibility which would permit students to 'taste' the vocational experience in an open and exploratory way. Secondly, universities and colleges tend to have a very different value system from most working environments. By facilitating the exploration only of a relatively narrow range of academic/intellectual values. And thirdly, such institutions typically remove students from their home communities and are highly homogeneous in terms of age-composition. They thus even conceal students from adult role-models against which they can evaluate themselves - apart, of course, from the University or Polytechnic lecturer.

The nature, length and frequency of contact between Careers Advisory Services and academic departments varies between and within institutions. In most cases Services, rather than departments, initiate communication. But evangelical though a Service may be, departmental co-operation is needed for contact to be fruitful. Certain departments may respond more promptly than others. Some may consider their sole preparatory function to coach students for academic hurdles. Possible reasons for the positive response of others may include the non-vocational nature of courses or a lowly position on the graduate-placement league table. Stoney (1984) cites difficulties advisers have in forming contacts with academic staff in their own institutions. However, there appears a good deal of departmental support, too.

Liaison may be brief and impersonal - as when a Service seeks permission to advertise itself on a departmental notice-board. It may extend to advisers addressing departmental students and answering their questions. Brevity may be preferable to expansiveness, enabling advisers to reach more students, and encouraging self-initiated student contact. Another argument favours careers education programmes of

comparable scope to those typically undertaken in secondary schools. The second approach has two disadvantages: low attendances may characterize offerings not essential to academic success, and advisers so engaged be less available to students actively seeking help. A compromise might be to disseminate material introducing the Service and career-choice issues, possibly doing this strategically by targeting particular groups. However, compromise, so often the answer, may not be appropriate here. Stoney (1984) claims there is a need to establish careers education programmes, and to instil interest among students. Certainly, it does seem myopic to devote the effort normally needed to enter and successfully complete a course of Higher Education without trying to use the reward to secure the most congenial work possible. Whether this view has any credibility with academics is an interesting question unfortunately beyond the scope of this study.

Is undue emphasis accorded the link between Higher Education and careers? The connection is obvious enough - a degree being a pre-requisite for particular jobs. Students opting for courses rich in vocational content doubtless perceive and utilise this. However, many others may see education and work as entirely separate things. This may be especially true of students who enjoy and seek to extend the former, while dreading and seeking to postpone the latter.
A problem facing careers advisers in Higher Education is the evident difference between that environment and most workplaces. Many students may find insufficient points to illuminate work through education. How many see education as enjoyable and intrinsically worthwhile, rather than as a preparation for work, however indirectly? Might they even see something wrong in treating the scholastic experience in a utilitarian way?

Employer Contacts

Though most careers information is aimed at individuals, many Services offer a programme of talks given by organisations selected according to the opportunities they offer graduates. Such programmes therefore normally exclude non-graduate occupations, but also those offering only a few such openings. The talks nevertheless have two advantages: the information needs of many can be met simultaneously, and additional knowledge gained through questions. They also offer students an introduction to organisation representatives, and the chance of further contact with them. However, their purpose is to acquaint students with particular occupations, rather than advertise specific employers. The success of talks seems largely dependent on how convincingly speakers present their occupation and through their own appearance and manner. This giving and receiving of occupational image seems worth exploring.

Organisations promote themselves and recruit on campus, mostly during the Spring and early Summer. Numerous companies visit institutions to set up their stalls, answer questions from interested students, and even interview to recruit. The perennial occurrence of these 'fairs', as they are often called, suggests that employers find they assist recruitment. However, many employers visit selectively, possibly resulting in good potential candidates elsewhere being overlooked. Gordon (1983) advocates communicating to employers information about students which may broaden their view. Organisations markedly focus attention on Universities, in preference to Polytechnics or Colleges, as instanced by Boys (1984). Boys thinks that other ways of communicating should be established, particularly to promote non-University students. By their preference for University graduates, he argues, employers are making decisions about students before, rather

than after, their courses. He feels that many students acquire marketable aptitudes and skills during their courses, and that these should be advertised to employers. This is not to deny that on-campus contact may be most useful to students already knowledgeable about visiting companies and wishing to make a commitment.

Stoney (1984) says that there is a need for employer liaison and visiting. Gordon (1983) bolsters this, arguing for more and specific information on employers, to help students target organisations. This might cover employers' general opinions of graduates, useful subjects to offer, levels of degree acceptable, and skills or experience considered useful. Gordon makes several points:

> ... most employers were keen to stress that it was the individual that they were interested in, rather than the institution attended ...

He quotes one employer as saying:

> It is very rarely desirable to have a 'graduate recruitment policy': if one chooses to recruit a graduate, one must plan the training resources that reflects the commitment to make the choice a successful one. Hence recruitment policy must extend into placement policy, job evaluation, pay and many other areas.

and another as saying:

> As a generalisation employers tend to recruit people who are too highly educated for the vacancy in question.

Goodrich (1988) itemises the usefulness of information seeking as a part of students' approaches to employers:

> Using the CL [Careers Library] in conjunction with the application letter assignment offers many advantages. In addition to learning a method of researching an organization and how to write an application letter, the students ...

Boys (1984) sums up several important things in one passage:

> Many employers used higher education as a useful screening device in which entry qualifications, particularly 'A' levels, and the type of institution attended were important in the initial selection of likely recruits. Underlying this were practical considerations including keeping down the costs of recruitment, but there were also strong indications that they felt that ability measured by examinations at 18 was not significantly altered by higher education. There was a widespread preference for University over polytechnic and college undergraduates because employers perceived them as having higher entry qualifications than other undergraduates. Attending a more vocational or relevant course in a polytechnic did not, it would appear, compensate for a candidate's lower 'A' level grades. To add to the problems of non-University undergraduates, there was little evidence that employers were enthusiastic to recruit them for posts traditionally filled by non-graduates.

Hatcher and Crook (1988) say that minimising surprises for graduates could help employers reduce job-change rates among staff. They also say that applicants must learn to use selection interviews to gather relevant, possibly negative, information.

What constitutes a graduate-level job is itself open to debate. Is it one to which entry is prohibited without a degree? If so, is this prerequisite founded on a need for recruits to arrive with a recognisable body of job-relevant knowledge? If not, is a degree required because graduates are believed to have job-relevant personal qualities unlikely to be found in non-graduates? If entrance is possible without a degree, but a large majority of recruits are graduates, why is this? Can few other applicants be found, or has a tradition of graduate recruitment grown up, perhaps imperceptibly and unchallenged? Are graduates often recruited principally because they have spent at least three years in a recognised and approved environment? Where graduates are recruited in numbers rather than in isolation, their attractiveness to employers may be explained more by their presumed

similarity than anything else. These questions should prompt not only recruiters to examine why they employ graduates, but encourage graduates to ask whether so-called graduate-level jobs are those most likely to satisfy them. Finally, how much graduate recruitment takes place to fulfil organisational image rather than acquire especially capable staff? Most graduates of twenty-one or two have to be trained from scratch, so might not many employers do better to recruit younger (or even older) non-graduates who might soon prove equally capable?

Graduate recruitment seems to be significantly influenced by dubious assumptions, if not outright shibboleths. Many employers are more enlightened than this generalisation suggests. However, some employers should more earnestly ask themselves why they recruit graduates, and which might best fulfil their requirements. Careers Advisory Services might play a significant part in any such revision.

What are the benefits of a graduate education for individuals and employers? They vary, but each student completing it presumably broadens and sharpens his intellectual skills. Many acquire knowledge useful as background or directly pertinent to the work they hope to do. During their period of study, many become more socially inclined, or at least more competent in social situations. Graduate employers stand to benefit from these changes. However, they should not assume that the qualities nurtured by some courses feature in every graduate. For example, not all are creative, though those completing design courses probably are. Nor should graduates be over-expectant. As new employees, they will probably have to learn much before contributing significantly, and organisations where this is so should not encourage them to think otherwise. Perhaps graduates should be content that their academic background makes them the favoured (or even the only) candidates

for jobs which non-graduates might perform equally competently.

The Information Calendar

The timing of information can be as important as its nature or delivery. It is reflected in the advertising and outreach strategies adopted by Services. The kind and quantity of information given to targeted groups, and when it is offered, influences what other activities advices and information staff can attempt. Despite no evidence of enquirers being neglected at times during the year, staff are engaged mainly in activities other than interviews. Callers may have to wait to be seen or asked to return at a later date. Knowledge of the information calendar is therefore important to students, too, lest they postpone consultation to a time when they are unlikely to receive the best service.

Because organisations invite applications at different times, students' job-search schedules may differ significantly. It is urgent to convey this. An April application may be acceptable to one firm, while one made the previous November too late for another. Students failing to realise this may lose their chance with certain employers, or have to apply a year later than intended. Though most significant for final-year students, the significance of the calendar should not be underestimated by their juniors. This may be especially true for those studying vocational subjects, where choice of project or study module may enhance or prejudice job applications. But early groundwork can help prevent errors of judgement, and, from the beginning of their second year, students may profitably be encouraged to impose time-limits on their researches.

The Careers Advisory Services are not alone in having a role to play here. The seriousness with which academic departments promote careers education and information is also influential. The more assiduous departments are in this respect, probably the smaller the risk of students hurrying career decisions, seeking last-minute guidance, or missing deadlines. Departmental involvement in careers work is important.

Clients' Views

Careers Advisory Services should attempt regularly to assess student satisfaction with information provision, and note their comments when planning change, or as a prompt to change. Doing this properly takes time and effort, and an annual review may prove difficult. Perhaps every second or third year, however, a serious attempt should be made to learn consumer opinion on a sizeable scale. However, even this has limitations. Scant response to canvassing might yield evidence too slim from which to draw reliable conclusions. Yet even a healthy response might not be representative. Many respondents may have found the Service helpful, but too long ago to say precisely how. Also, a questionnaire alone might not elicit all the data needed. Interviews and even brainstorming sessions might, respectively, flush out initial responses and help solve problems. Any proposed major change to information provision might itself justify a canvass. The part which client consultation and surveillance have played in the design of information provision seems worth examining.

Records

Careers Advisory Services make numerous contacts with students, employers, academic departments, other academic institutions, and other bodies. Many such contacts involve gathering information. This raises the question of how, and even whether, such material should be recorded. Printed information can simply be filed, but methods of transposing information obtained by telephone or during interviews must be established. There must also be a consensus of what is worth recording, and resources devoted to this.

Information so regarded must be categorized, prioritized, and appropriately presented. The likely volume of such material makes it preferable for Services initially to err on the side of brevity rather than expansiveness in each record. Some kinds of information lend themselves to this. For instance, vacancy and employer information can be standardised or condensed. Client information, however, may not be dealt with as easily. Moreover, advisers' ideas of what is useful client information will vary. The worth of recording client information may be debatable if most consult their Service only once, or where visits are far apart, or where client numbers discourage record-keeping of any kind.

Computers may seem a tempting answer to some of these problems. For retrieval purposes, technology offers advantages. However, it should be introduced cautiously. Any information made available on computer first has to be written down, then typed into a storage bank. This is laborious, and justified only if the information so preserved is well-used.

Finally, some information which clients divulge may be personal. The ethics of recording and accessing it must be established and observed.

Possible Research Issues

From what has been said, the following questions emerge as issues deserving to be explored in the case study section of the thesis.

1) What are the careers information needs of different student groups?
2) How far can students be expected to diagnose their own information needs?
3) Is careers interview time used to good effect?
4) Is some client information difficult for students or advisers to discuss?
5) What criteria are employed in selecting careers information?
6) Is the content of careers publications satisfactory?
7) Does the careers library reflect any presumptions about users?
8) How knowledgeable need careers advisers be?
9) What training is available on information skills?
10) Would information preparation lubricate careers interviews?
11) Do information staff and careers advisers communicate enough?
12) What careers information initiatives have been taken by departments within institutions?
13) In information terms, how helpful are organisation representatives?
14) Do employers hold misconceptions about graduates, and could these be corrected?
15) How does the 'information calendar' affect advisers' work?
16) What is the nature, purpose and actual use of client contact record systems?
17) Are clients canvassed on information issues, and if so, how?
18) How do budgetary considerations influence information supply?

Conclusion

Clearly, careers information issues are numerous and far from simple. Several factors contribute chiefly to their complexity: the number and range of enquirers, the breadth of information sources, the rapid obsolescence of most careers publications, the need to balance information with guidance and education, difficulties of obtaining or maintaining resources, and the varying credibility of careers activities within institutions. There appears good prima facie evidence for careers information being accorded a higher, or at least more carefully-drawn profile in some, and perhaps most, institutions. A detailed investigation of selected Higher Education Careers Advisory Services might throw light on this claim, and to this end the rest of the thesis is devoted.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODS

The nature and variety of the questions listed at the end of Chapter 2 made purposeful investigation of them all unwieldy. Some might have been answered satisfactorily only by accumulating and sifting large quantities of factual material, while others would have involved an ethnographic study of a Careers Advisory Service. Also, it was considered appropriate to tackle questions having a collective coherence, in preference to a selection which had none. Accordingly, the final question-range deemed appropriate for this study was as follows:

1) How far can students be expected to diagnose their own information needs?
2) What are the criteria for selecting careers information materials?
3) Is the content of careers publications satisfactory?
4) How knowledgeable need careers advisers be?
5) How does the information calendar affect advisers' work?
6) What is the nature, purpose and actual use of client-contact record systems?
7) How helpful, informationally, are organisation representatives?
8) What careers information initiatives have been taken by departments within institutions?
9) What is the status of careers information staff?
10) How do Careers Advisory Services advertise themselves?

It was decided best to explore these issues through direct contact with Higher Education institutions. This would permit

scrutiny of particular Service mechanisms and practices relating to the questions. It would also offer the chance to question staff about findings. This seemed likely to encourage better understanding of information matters, and show how attitudes might affect practice. The number of institutions so researched was restricted to four, with the intention that this would permit a depth of investigation difficult with more. While extrapolation would be made with less confidence than using a larger sample, this would permit survey of a wider range of practices and influences, and a level of interpretation and even speculation not otherwise possible within a thesis of this one's bounds. Two questions remained, however. Would careers staff identify with the questions selected? Secondly, what methods would be most likely to achieve staff co-operation in eliciting desired data? An initial answer to both was to formulate a questionnaire inspired partly by the proposed research questions, in the hope that the responses would legitimise these. The questionnaire would also request background information on each Service's systems of guidance and careers information. This was likely to help the preparation of further, more detailed investigation.

According to Davidson (1970), the ideal questionnaire is:

> Clear, unambiguous and uniformly workable. Its design must minimise potential errors from respondents ... and coders. And since people's participation in surveys is voluntary, a questionnaire has to help in engaging their interest, encouraging their co-operation, and eliciting answers as close as possible to the truth.

It was recognised that a questionnaire had limitations as an investigative technique. Firstly, the format required brief responses, which might omit significant information. Secondly, only a few questions

related to each issue could be posed, risking the respondent having no opportunity to mention something important. Moreover, a combination of these restrictions might distort the nature or significance of particular practices. Set against them, however, were several advantages. The questionnaire posed no geographical restrictions, thereby permitting a fairly large opinion-sample to be taken economically. It would allow a type and order of question conducive to easily-ascertained responses, facilitating quantification and comparison. Thirdly, it would test the relevance of the research questions themselves, permitting any necessary adjustments in advance of case studies. Care would have to be taken to guard against responses masking issues worth investigating.

The geographical focus next had to be decided. It was determined to select randomly ten Universities and ten Polytechnics within specified regions to ensure that each area of the country was represented. The Careers Advisory Service in each institution was sent a copy of the questionnaire. In addition, four northern institutions (two Universities and two Polytechnics) were selected as the potential foci of detailed exploration. These were for the researcher local establishments chosen largely for investigative convenience. They, too, were sent copies of the questionnaire, and their responses taken into account along with those of other Services in initial assessment of trends.

Colleges did not feature in the selection. Properly to assess practice in Universities and Polytechnics, detailed investigation of more than one of each was considered desirable. This meant contact with four institutions, and possibly more than one visit to each. It was considered burdensome to similarly scrutinize two more. Also, most Higher Education colleges in the locality provided training mainly for

particular occupations, notably teaching. They therefore did not offer the study range characteristic of the Universities and Polytechnics, rendering unsuitable many of the questions to be asked.

Who, specifically, should receive the questionnaire? It was tempting to canvass opinion from the broadest possible range of careers staff, including Heads of Service, advisers and information staff. However, it was considered wiser to limit initial contact to one person per Service. This would eliminate the risk of several replies from some Services, and few from others, which might distort the overall picture. It was hoped that a range of opinion would be obtained at the case-study investigation stage. Directors of Service were selected as the most suitable questionnaire recipients. They were considered likely to have considerable experience, to know what happened at all levels within their Service, and, as well as giving their own opinions, might to some degree reflect those of colleagues. They also would probably have been in their Service long enough to place particular practices or trends in a historical perspective. Also, they would almost certainly still act as careers advisers some of their time.

In their book 'Educational Research - An Introduction', Borg and Gall (1983) say that sampling "involves the selection of a portion of a population as representative of the population". The questionnaire part of the present survey sought to obtain information from twenty-four institutions out of a possible seventy-five. With twenty-one completed questionnaires returned, the actual sample exceeded 85%. This appeared sufficient for the fairly basic information elicited through the questionnaire to be considered representative.

Nevertheless, some points about the sample should be made. No Service actively refused to participate; however, had any done so,

this could have rendered less reliable the evidence of those which took part. A significant proportion of refusals (say, over 20%) might have resulted in a less-than-accurate picture of the body of institutions, or of the concept of the typical institution.

The brevity and limited scope of the survey made it unlikely for anyone to drop out. Attrition happens frequently with larger samples, or in projects lasting a year or more. Job changes and retirements can contribute significantly to this haemorrhage. As a preventative, larger samples than appear strictly necessary may be taken. As the sampling for this survey was accomplished within a few months, the problem did not arise.

In the selection of Universities and Polytechnics, stratified sampling might have ensured a fair representation of institutions of various sizes. This might, for example, have better indicated the appropriateness of staffing levels by comparing like with like, rather than, say, a large University's Service with a small Polytechnic's. At the interview stage, cluster sampling might have been used as a safeguard against the personal prejudices of Heads of Service and information officers. Such a sample would have canvassed the opinions of several staff in each Service.

There are hazards with a small sample. One is that it may be too restricted to highlight differences between organisations, practices or individuals. This can apply especially where the scope to answer is restricted, as in multiple-choice questionnaire items. Where significant variables are likely, the need for a sizeable sample becomes more urgent.

The reliability of answers also has to be scrutinized. Distortion may occur through restrictions on time (in interviews) or space (in

questionnaires). This can sometimes encourage respondents to say what they think most important, but lead them to omit other significant data. At the outset, care should be taken to ensure that questions are put to those best able to answer them. Even where this appears to have been done, such people are not always fully conversant with all their nominal responsibilities. Also, they may perceive some matters quite differently from their colleagues, particularly subordinates.

The main purpose of the questionnaire was to assess existing conditions rather than compare practices with an 'ideal' Service. Nevertheless, ideals are important, and an objective of the questionnaire was to gain some idea of underpinning philosophies of the Services consulted. The format required brief responses, but even these could suggest basic premises, and space for elaboration was left at the end of the questionnaire. Effort was made to encourage respondents and include questions likely to interest them. Besides being easy to read, these had to be unambiguous and in a suitable order psychologically. Arousing respondents' enthusiasm was important, not only in pursuit of completed questionnaires, but for their possible future involvement.

A copy of the questionnaire was therefore sent to a total of twenty-four Directors of Careers Advisory Services in Universities and Polytechnics in England. Each was given a coded identification, and a letter outlining the nature and objectives of the project enclosed together with a stamped, addressed envelope for the return of the completed questionnaire. The letters sent to the four institutions earmarked for case-study investigation also requested discussion-time. When the four had agreed to this, and most questionnaires had been returned completed, a list of research questions for discussion was sent to them.

There were four main reasons for adopting the interview as the

major case study research technique. It provided a means of exploring respondents' opinions, of following-up questionnaire answers, of confirming the relevance of research questions, and allowing a view of information and advisory facilities, since interviews were to take place on Service premises.

The interview had limitations as a research technique. An obvious one was time. A realistic and even conservative estimate had to be made of the number of topics to cover. This seemed especially important in view of the subjects. The nominally reserved time of Directors of Services might not be sacrosanct. The Directors might devote time to anecdote and analysis which, however interesting, delayed schedules. It was essential that all research questions were covered in interviews, and it was recognised that interrupting the speaker might occasionally be necessary. Another potential restriction was the interview setting. This did not have to be spacious, but quiet and freedom from interruption were important. The setting and duration of interviews could be stipulated, even if this limited the number of interviews possible. Related factors, often problems in school-based research, were less likely in Higher Education settings, where more peaceful conditions prevail, and prolonged discussions are not uncommon. Nevertheless, three possible further hindrances remained. Firstly, there might be suspicion of the interviewer's motives, prompting guarded responses. Secondly, he might be perceived as a 'power broker', and answers tailored in an effort to capitalise on this. Finally, recording interview data might pose technical or communication problems. It was recognised that effort should be made to adopt the simplest and least risky method of recording consistent with the intended uses of the material. In this investigation, however, there seemed relatively little risk of any of these factors leading to inaccurate data. The

researcher was not employed within Higher Education, nor a member of any investigative body, nor were the findings destined for perusal by influential organisations. It was decided to record data in note-form, to eliminate risk of losing material through technical malfunction.

Interview preparation was important. It was considered conducive to clear and thoughtful answers to have forewarned interviewees of the topics to be covered. At the outset of each interview, a clear explanation of its intended structure and objectives was therefore made, and the precise framing, wording and order of questions determined in advance and adhered-to in practice. Neutrality in the delivery of questions was also striven-for, not to encourage or discourage particular answers. This seemed likely to promote consistent interpretation and render data more valid. It was accepted that the precise wording of scheduled questions need not prohibit necessary clarification, nor inhibit responses. Time has already been mentioned as a general restriction, and care had to be taken not to overshoot on any question or section. However, it was important to be sensitive to productive lines of thought, especially if these had implications for questions following. It was recognised that the interviewee could be encouraged in appropriate ways, such as by expressions of interest or requests to continue. However, no such behaviour which steered the interviewee towards particular responses was acceptable. Even remarks had to be cautious, since any which was less-than-neutral might distort a contribution. Equally, it was important to be alert to any issue-skirting, and to be ready to introduce even unrehearsed questions in pursuit of important data. This would have to be done carefully, to maintain impartiality and not unduly disturb either the question-sequence or time-schedule.

Twenty-one completed questionnaires out of twenty-four sent were returned - a healthy response. Moreover, the abundance of written

comments additional to requirements suggested a positive interest in what seems a comparatively little-documented aspect of careers work. The questionnaire elicited some stimulating comments. One University adviser said that Faculties or departments were:

> ... unwilling to accept or consider new and innovative ideas by advisory staff.

Other comments included:

> More students tend to be delaying the job search until after graduation. [The] Milk Round therefore appears to be decreasing in popularity ...
>
> Records of interviews [are] kept for up to five years.
>
> We don't have careers advisers as such.
>
> Some academic staff [are] more interested in academic work than [the] job prospects of students.
>
> Some [staff] are definitely not [knowledgeable about work opportunities relating to their field].
>
> ... students are taught to realise that we are facilitators not knowledge machines.

One adviser commented that the Service demands offered:

> ... limited chance to reflect [and] read.

In all, six members of Careers Advisory Services were interviewed: four directors and two information officers. Interviewees were generous with their time, and although in most instances the scheduled hour was exceeded, all research questions were answered fully and uncomplainingly.

Some further comments on questionnaire and interview - the field research techniques employed in this survey - seem merited, in the light

of use. The questionnaire offered limited space for respondents' comments, and it was anticipated that completed ones would be characterized more by hard information than respondents' feelings. There were more than a few exceptions to this, and sometimes a great deal of enthusiasm or discontent was expressed very succinctly. Such condensed strength commanded attention. The questionnaire also proved helpful in pin-pointing unpromising lines of research through predictable or lack-lustre responses. Besides providing data, interviews proved helpful in clarifying ambiguities or uncertainties, making up for oversights or inherent limitations in the questionnaire. They also proved rich in anecdotal material, often necessary to the proper understanding of an issue. In all, questionnaire and interview proved themselves fairly reliable tools for a small-scale investigation of this kind.

The short time-scale of the survey gave a snapshot picture of each Service. A longer-term one would have permitted observation at different points of the year. This might have illustrated features unapparent during a single visit, or encouraged staff observations not made during a single interview. It would also have admitted contributions from other staff. A possible advantage of the single contact was in concentrating the minds of contributors, who knew there would be no second chance to air their views. Also, the single impression of information facilities might have paralleled its first impact on student visitors.

Despite the survey's declared limitations, there are reasons for considering its findings valid and worthwhile. Careers information appears to have been accorded scant attention by previous researchers, so the topic deserves examination. Questionnaire and interview acted as checks on each other, and their correlation was encouraging, with no significant discrepancies or inconsistencies. While emotions can

distort truth or meaning, responses earned reliability at times through the feeling with which they were delivered, when the facts prompting them were evident or easily checked. Contributors often alluded to the situations of their colleagues and counterparts elsewhere, broadening the picture and bolstering what they said.

Contributors were promised a summary of the survey's findings, which would offer an albeit belated opportunity for additional comment and fresh insight.

CHAPTER 4

RESPONSES TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE

A complete record of responses to the questionnaire sent to Directors of Careers Advisory Services is given at the end of the chapter. However, much of this material deserves comment and analysis, and to be related to what has been said so far. Part of its purpose is to validate the topics selected for detailed investigation in case studies, to suggest ways to approach them or see which aspects might prove most interesting. Of the twenty-four questionnaires sent, twenty-one were returned completed, making a pleasing 87% response-rate.

From the responses, it appeared that 3rd and 4th year students were the heaviest users of Careers Advisory Services. This was no surprise, but it must further be asked why they were using their Service. If it was to refine job knowledge or discover application procedures, this hints at rushed choices and missed deadlines. It would have been interesting to know what proportion of students paid their first visit to their Service during their final year. Records and surveys can yield this sort of information, which illustrates the importance of Services keeping close track of their client-group.

Most respondents classified students' career knowledge 'patchy'. This is an unspecific term, but one which suggests shortcomings. Many students might have agreed with this assessment of their knowledge, but others might not. What counts as valid information hinges on such as the acceptability of respondents' comments. We may expect careers advisers, as neutral agents possessing knowledge and experience, to be better able than students to judge certain things about, or affecting

those students. However, the students may, individually and privately, construct their own information hierarchies, prioritising factors they consider most influential to their decision-making, and relegating those they do not, possibly in contrast to careers staff opinion. This may lead to problems. Students may not be able to afford to be fastidious about the information they choose to read or remember, even though this reflects their real feelings about specific work. It is disappointing to hear that students are often not well-versed in careers information, since their studies require them regularly to excavate material. However, it is perhaps mistaken to believe they will transfer this skill to other endeavours. Students attending careers interviews without having already acquired important information will have to contemplate immediately any the adviser offers, instead of being ready to introduce their feelings about it to the discussion. This seems likely to slow interview progress, and not allow students best to capitalise on advisers' skills. It may also lead to impulsive rather than considered answers to advisers' questions, possibly steering the guidance process in the wrong direction. Students might usefully be encouraged to examine careers information before consulting an adviser.

First year students were said to use the Service least. This, too, was not surprising, since they are adjusting to new patterns of study and living, and have time on their side. However, some students have to make significant decisions about study relatively early in their academic programme. Examples might be which course module to select or what project topic to tackle, choices potentially promotional or detrimental to their eventual career plans. It would be interesting to know what proportion of students make such decisions only after consultation on the career implications, and whether academic staff

(whom they surely often consult) are themselves aware of these implications.

Twelve respondents cited aspects of their Services they considered possible discouragements to clients. This was disappointing, since enticing clients into Service premises may be the hardest step towards helping them. Some respondents' comments are worth quoting:

> [The] thought that one is going to be confronted with decisions, and analysis of strengths and weaknesses does discourage some students.
>
> First and second-year students tend to be under [the] impression that we only cater for finalists.
>
> [The reason for avoidance] is connected with the end of 'Salad Days'.
>
> Sundrae [sic] misconceptions (e.g. that we "push" conventional courses - in accountancy ... etc., that you need to know what career you want before you use the Careers Service, etc. ... [these are] not widespread views, but nevertheless they are there in some cases).
>
> Insufficient resources - students go elsewhere if there is no-one available to help, or we do not hold [the] materials they need.

Not all the discouraging factors can be avoided. For instance, there seems no avoiding decision-making in career choice. However, anxieties or laments about the end of 'Salad Days' might be reduced by highlighting the attractions of working life. Misconceptions about the sort of help Careers Advisory Services offer, and to whom, can surely be largely dispelled by good marketing.

Most Services had made a recent analysis of their role and provision. Fourteen claimed that this had resulted in significant changes. Though some Services did not say what these were, many did. Most of the changes sounded positive. More than one Service mentioned

greater emphasis on student self-help, though this was balanced elsewhere through extended opening hours and the offer of 'drop-in' rather than scheduled interviews. Two Services did more careers education and groupwork than formerly, while another had recently begun to tackle many information needs via computer. One Service had revised its publicity and marketing methods. Only two comments, however, suggested that survey findings had initiated action beyond the Service itself. On the positive side, one had resulted in a relocation of the Careers Advisory Service in the organisational hierarchy. On the negative, one Service had had to contend with 20% involuntary staff cuts. Perhaps the risk of this last-mentioned change had influenced some Services not to scrutinize themselves. However, the general trend was encouraging, not least because it suggested a reasonable level of awareness and morale. That changes were considered desirable showed the importance of reviewing provision.

Most clients' needs were said to be informational. This was very significant in reinforcing the notion that much advance preparation could be done by students. Advisers also advocated students obtaining careers information before consulting them. Only half, however, said that the students did this. This should prompt investigation of why students do not make more effort to obtain information. Does the material discourage them, or might staff be better trained in information skills?

Most Services considered only a very small percentage of received enquiries as outside their province. However, there were several exceptions, where the proportion seemed high. Whether inappropriate enquiries appended appropriate ones, or whether they represented misconceptions of the role of Services, was not investigated.

Many students requested information designed to help in self-presentation at interviews. This provision, and students' interest in it, was encouraging. Many might benefit, but more needs to be known about how likely this provision is to instil the desired skills. Some kind of rehearsal may be a necessary supplement. Whether there was any lack of correlation between the skills fostered, and what employers expected of interviewees, should also be asked. A related question is whether self-presentation skills were communicated or acquired through groupwork or individually.

Commendably, all Services offered information designed for handicapped students. Whether it expanded or limited clients' career ideas needs to be answered. Material geared only to probabilities hinders consumers from seeing possibilities. Information can discourage, as well as encourage, and it should avoid the former without misleading. The questionnaire did not ask whether any staff were skilled in dealing with handicapped students, or even nominally responsible for them.

Most Services believed they met the needs of their mature students. The sizeable proportion of mature full or part-time students in most institutions shows that this should not be left to chance. Information (and guidance) may be particularly important to older students, since recruitment-age trends or restrictions effectively debar them from some occupations.

Nearly all Services had a separate information room or browsing area for clients. However, their size varied considerably. Dimension and layout are important to the effective use of such facilities. If users are confused about where to find information, or feel cramped, they may leave soon and not return.

It was claimed that many students requested help to find

information. How much assistance is typically provided might profitably be explored. Help may constitute a simple direction, or a detailed investigation. Whichever, this system should be streamlined to avoid staff wasting time. However, any "short-cut" should be checked to ensure that it does what it is supposed to.

A photocopier was available to clients in most Services. This was important, especially where reference materials could not be borrowed. However, any charge made for use may reduce custom. Reliability and waiting times are factors, too. It would have been interesting to know whether staff used the same machine as students, or enjoyed exclusive use of another.

All Services claimed to make available audio-visual or computer aids. However, these were not necessarily better than more conventional storage and retrieval systems. Given their likely cost, their popularity seemed worth ascertaining.

All Services produced their own careers literature. Services should do this cautiously, lest valuable staff time is spent writing material already available elsewhere. Anything produced should therefore represent a local picture, or only plug gaps in general provision. Distinctive in-house information can boost a Service's image. Sometimes financial and other considerations may not recommend its production.

Several Services did not allow students to borrow careers information. This may have been an understandable precaution against damage or loss, but one necessary to offset by offering easy duplication or multiple copies of at least the most popular items. Possibly compendia of essential information would be more useful than comprehensive editions. This might enable Services to buy more copies, and save students spending time sifting large items for basic data.

All but three Services kept a client record system. None is valuable, however, unless used. Records may help staff prepare to see particular clients, or in compiling and assessing trends preparatory to future activities.

Most Services claimed that information was arranged primarily to facilitate use, but conformity with an established coding system, conserving space and attracting clients also figured significantly. No Service claimed that some systems were too focused and needed to take into account other factors.

In most Services, careers information stock review was ongoing, but rather than being automatic, replenishment depended on usage. Varied material may require more than one review system. Most occupational leaflets and booklets were considered obsolete after between one and three years. Advisers' own updated knowledge might encourage them to expel material they recognise as obsolete, or recommend new items.

Most information ordering systems were said to be speedy and reliable. These adjectives allow breadth of interpretation, however. A system may be reliable because orders are placed months in advance, success depending more on customer anticipation than efficient provision. Annual requirements may not be hard to judge, but an unanticipated 'run' on an item may leave a Service short of supplies. If so, replenishment should be possible. This is a reasonable expectation, especially where suppliers hold virtual monopoly on the material, or represent the occupation in question.

The number of advisory staff in Services ranged from two to ten. Most employed three or four. Even allowing for size variation in institutions, these numbers suggest considerable differences in Service

provision. These may contribute to institutional differences in student placement rates, or how well students adapt to first destinations. Advisers in the less populous Services may have to forego activities which their more numerous counterparts elsewhere engage in. Alternatively, they may just become more inventive, economical and efficient, and their students be none the worse off.

Most Services had designated responsibility for careers information to a member of staff whose principal duty this was. All Services but one had someone available to answer information requests at any time during opening hours. This was a pleasing confirmation of regard for information needs. It seemed preferable to shared responsibility, where personal commitment may differ, and working methods be inconsistent.

Most advisers were expected to have general careers knowledge, and some to display specialist knowledge, too. Only five Service respondents said that their advisers' knowledge was entirely specific. Ten claimed that no problems arose from their system, three that they did. Thirteen claimed advantages accrued from their approach. While one adviser claimed that specialism was "vital", and another that students obtained better information by seeking out specialists, the generalists gave stronger voice to their system. Chief advantages cited were that any adviser could see any client; students did not have to decide their interests before talking; there was no risk of advisers channelling students; there were no waiting-lists, and better adviser-client relationships were built. One respondent claimed that expert knowledge was over-rated.

Several Services ran careers information training sessions for staff, but in most they were expected to update themselves. Training

sessions ensure that no-one misses anything significant. Left to their own judgement, however, advisers can focus on what experience tells them they need to know. Most were expected to possess a good range of factual and lifestyle information on those occupations they were supposed to know about. Few claimed that very detailed knowledge was necessary; neither, however, did any contend that basic facts alone were enough. It is worth noting that analysis clarifying a client's options is possible without detailed knowledge. Assessing human factors or long-term prospects may be easier for most advisers than most students, on grounds of age and maturity alone.

In eleven Services, students were expected to obtain or furnish information before interviews. In the other Services, they were not. This by itself does not tell us whether advisers actually prepared material or considered interviewees' wishes or circumstances in advance. However, it appears a helpful exercise on behalf of clients making very particular enquiries, or in unusual circumstances. Nearly all Services kept interview records, but it is important to know more. Were they structured to facilitate statistical breakdown or geared mainly to clients' interests? If the latter, how often were they referred to? What exactly was the system of recording, and what resources did it consume?

All Services claimed to have regular contact with faculties or departments. Nearly all of these were said to react well to liaison, though nine Services had experienced some resistance to their ideas. The question of resistance is interesting. What Careers Advisory Services' action did academic departments find threatening, unnecessary or of poor quality? Where, in fact, did departmental priorities lie? If only in terms of self-interest it was surprising that they did not

appear especially concerned to promote the successful placement of their students. Some of this seeming indifference may be explained by a perceived intrusion, in some departments of the 'practical' into the realm of the 'abstract' or scholastic. More specifically, it may betoken nervousness of, and opposition to, governmental values which prize what is quantifiable and which, more sinisterly, may in future seek to impose this standard on sectors or elements of academic life hitherto unmolested.

Services were almost equally divided over whether departmental staff were knowledgeable about work opportunities relating to their own field. Even within single institutions, staff differed in their levels of occupational knowledge and interest. This may partly reflect personal histories. Staff who spent time in industry or commerce might be helpfully conversant with their needs and norms. Alternatively, they might be holding fast to obsolete facts and images. Conversely, staff lacking such experience may dismiss it as unimportant, or, conscious of a gap in their understanding, strive to bridge it. Occupational knowledge seemed likely to be lowest among staff whose departments offered courses with no obvious vocational outlet.

Most Services offered a programme of talks by invited speakers. Respondents able to assess attendances said that these averaged 20-40, and all said that the sessions prompted questions and discussion. It was difficult, however, to acquire a typical picture. One Service pointed out that some talks attracted fewer than five students, others, more than a hundred. The correlation between the numbers attending talks, and those ultimately entering the occupations these represented, would have been interesting to know. Did such talks encourage or dissuade? In either case, they may have been useful. Eliminating what is of no interest can be as important as identifying what is.

Some Services classed financial information confidential. Among those who did not, there were considerable discrepancies, annual budgets ranging between £200-500, and over £2,000. As with staffing levels, this raised serious questions of what can be accomplished by different Services. However, meaningful comparison must rely on a closer definition of what facilities fall within the information budget.

Most Services said they were unable to obtain all the information they needed. All used sources of free materials, but it was uncertain whether the most fruitful ones were usually resorted-to.

Staff at all Services appeared to be consulted before information-related spending decisions were made. 'Consultation', however, may have constituted in-depth discussion or simply giving the nod to already-formulated plans. It seemed likely that the amount of consultation possible or desirable varied with the size of Service.

Almost all Services claimed the Autumn and Spring terms as their busiest times of year. Three cited the Autumn, specifically. Services were divided over whether their levels of work at these times inhibited other activities. The questionnaire did not permit investigation of how much work during busy periods was client-generated, and how much by more general demands.

The questionnaire responses did not give cause to revise any of the case-study questions. they did, however, suggest particular lines of exploration following the posing of each issue.

A detailed breakdown of questionnaire responses follows.

Analysis of the Careers Information Questionnaire

Question 1 - The Clients

a) Academic year-group using the Careers Advisory Service most.

1st Year	2nd Year	3rd/4th Year	Post-Graduates
0	3	18	0

b) Students using the Service principally to:

Help themselves	Seek assistance
5	16

c) Academic year-group using the Careers Advisory Service least.

1st Year	2nd Year	3rd/4th Year	Post - Graduates
18	2	0	1

d) Level of the average client's level of careers knowledge.

Very poor	Patchy	Reasonable	Good	Excellent
0	14	4	0	0

e) Services claiming aspects of themselves which might discourage student use.

Yes	No
14	7

f) Services having recently analysed their role and provision.

Yes	No
18	3

Question 2 - Clients' Needs

a) Appropriateness of most clients' requests in relation to what advisers consider their real needs.

Very Relevant	Fairly Relevant	Partially Relevant	Barely Relevant
2	12	3	1

b) Services claiming the relation of most clients' declared needs was to:

Information	Self-Awareness
17	0

c) Importance of students obtaining basic careers information before consulting a careers adviser.

Yes	No
18	2

Number of Services where students in fact did this.

Yes	No
9	10

d) Number of Services where the proportion of enquiries received which were not the province of the Careers Advisory Service.

Under 5%	5-10%	10-15%	15-20%	Over 20%
16	3	1	0	1

e) Number of Services in which clients generally followed advice to consult sources beyond the Careers Advisory Service.

Yes	No
14	2

f) Number of Services in which a proportion of clients requested information on self-presentation.

Under 5%	5-10%	10-20%	20-30%	Over 30%
0	1	4	6	8

g) Number of Services with information available for handicapped students.

Yes	No
21	0

h) Services in which it was felt that the information needs of adult students were met.

Yes	No
16	5

Question 3 - Information Materials

a) Number of Services which had a separate information room or browsing area.

Yes	No
20	1

b) Services where, in seeking information, most students appeared to:

Find what they wanted	Needed help
9	10

c) Services where a photocopier was available to clients.

Yes	No
16	5

d) Services where audio-visual or computer information aids were available to students.

Yes	No
20	1

e) Services producing their own careers materials.

Yes	No
21	0

f) Services where students can borrow careers information.

Yes	No
12	8

g) Services where a client contact record system is kept.

Yes	No
17	4

Question 4 - Arrangement and Replenishment of Materials

a) Services arranging information mainly to:

Conform to an established coding system	10
Conserve space	9
Attract clients	9
Facilitate use	20
Encourage item return	0

b) Services whose information stock review is:

Ongoing	Periodic
18	3

c) Services whose stock replenishment is:

Automatic	Dependent on usage
5	13

d) Services considering occupational leaflets/booklets obsolete after set periods.

Under 1 year	1
1-2 years	9
2-3 years	7
3-5 years	3
Over 5 years	0

e) Services who find material ordering systems:

	Yes	No
Speedy	14	5
Reliable	15	3

Question 5 - Staff and their Needs

a) Numbers of Services with number of Careers Advisers indicated.

Number of Advisers	1-2	3-4	5-6	7-8	9-10
Services	5	11	1	0	3

b) Number of Services having someone exclusively or mainly responsible for careers information.

Yes	No
18	2

c) Services in which a member of staff is always available to answer information requests.

Yes	No
20	1

d) Services in which careers advisers are expected to be:

Knowledgeable across the full range of graduate occupations	10
Especially conversant with a specific occupational field	7
Both	4

Services where problems arise from this

Yes	No
4	11

Services which find important advantages in the approach they adopt.

Yes	No
15	0

e) Services where, in respect of information, staff:

Attend information sessions	7
Are expected to keep up-to-date themselves	11

f) Services where a given level of understanding of any particular occupation is expected of an adviser.

Very basic facts	0
A good range of facts	7
Good factual and lifestyle information	9
Very detailed information and understanding	3

g) Services where students are expected to obtain careers information or supply information about themselves in advance of an appointment.

Yes	No
12	9

h) Services in which client interview records are kept.

Yes	No
18	3

Question 6 - Liaison with Faculties or Departments

a) Careers Advisory Services having regular contact with Faculties or Departments.

Yes	No
21	0

b) Services finding particular Faculties/Departments reacting well to liaison.

Yes	No
18	2

c) Institutions at which departmental staff were considered knowledgeable by the Careers Advisory Service about work opportunities relating to their field.

Yes	No
8	7

d) Services having experienced resistance to its ideas by faculties or departments.

Yes	No
12	7

Question 7 - Visitors

a) Careers Advisory Services offering a programme of talks by invited speakers.

Yes	No
17	4

b) Services whose average attendances are as follows:

10-20	20-40	40-70	70-100	Over 100
4	8	3	1	0

c) Services whose arranged talks prompt questions and discussion.

Yes	No
17	0

d) Services considering useful the 'Milk Round' and/or any other student canvass by employers.

Yes	No
11	4

Question 8 - Finance

a) Services whose annual finances to fulfil information needs fall into the following categories.

£200-500	£500-1000	£1000-1500	£1500-2000	Over £2000
4	3	2	0	6

b) Services able to obtain all the information resources needed.

Yes	No
7	13

c) Services utilising sources of free material.

Yes	No
19	0

d) Services in which staff are formally consulted before spending decisions relating to information are made.

Yes	No
18	1

Question 9 - The Information Calendar

a) Busiest times of year for Careers Advisory Services, with regard to information.

Autumn	Autumn/Spring	All the time
4	14	1

b) Service demands upon which at these times affect what they can do in other respects.

Yes	No
9	9

CHAPTER 5

THE FINDINGS

Appearance and Facilities

Two University and two Polytechnic Careers Advisory Services were visited to see how provision related to the questions identified in Chapter 3. For the purpose of the exercise, the larger University will hereafter be known as 'Metropolis', the smaller, 'Greenbelt', the larger Polytechnic as 'Bigtown', the smaller, 'Lakeside'. The material presented in this Chapter is based on interviews conducted with careers staff in these four institutions.

Four Careers advisers (one at each Service) and two Information Officers (at one University and one Polytechnic) were interviewed. The advisers were all male, aged in their forties or fifties. The Information Officers were women in their twenties or thirties. Each interviewee had at least several years' experience of careers work in Higher Education. To supplement information acquired through the interviews, a scrutiny of the information room in each Service was made.

Services were organised differently. In the Universities, particularly Metropolis, staff roles appeared closely defined. In the Polytechnics, this appeared less true. In all four Services, however, no Information Officers engaged in guidance work. All Services were responsible to a committee composed mainly or exclusively of staff of the institution. Support staff with no direct responsibility for guidance or information worked in three of the four Services. Metropolis University was, however, the only one with more than one such member of staff.

NAME	INSTITUTION	STUDENTS	ADVISERS	CAREERS STAFF	
				INFORMATION OFFICERS	SUPPORT
Metropolis (Uni)	Large, Civic	10,500	10	1	10
Greenbelt (Uni)	Small, Campus, 1960s	3,600	3	1	1
Bigtown (Poly)	Large, City	4,520	2	1	1
Lakeside (Poly)	Medium, Town	6,000	2	1	1

The University Services enjoyed significantly better premises than those in the Polytechnics. This was unexpected, since there was no obvious qualitative difference between them in respect of other premises. The contrast in accommodation between one of the University Services and one of the Polytechnics' was particularly stark. The former was housed in an attractive, single-level building in the centre of the campus. It had a sizeable reception area, private advisers' rooms, an extensive information room with, leading off it, small rooms for video viewing, computer information/guidance work, a storeroom and an information officer's room. Each room was spacious, well illuminated and attractively appointed. By contrast, the Polytechnic Service was in an old and rather dilapidated terrace-house across a busy road from the main campus. The Careers centre was up a narrow flight of stairs, and noticeably cramped, having only a very small information room and a private adviser's room, neither bearing signs of recent refurbishment. The setting seemed unlikely to attract visitors, nor entice them to linger.

Such discrepancies may be especially disagreeable when they suggest differences not merely between institutions, but between sectors of

Higher Education. This fuels the belief that Polytechnics are second-best, and may plant doubt in the minds of those prepared to accept that they have a role equally valid to that of Universities. But we must be cautious here. Spacious, well-appointed Services may attract some students but intimidate others, who would feel more comfortable in more modest surroundings. It may be precipitate to assume that the better-appointed a Service, the more clients it will have.

A further, if less emphatic contrast distinguished the two Universities from the two Polytechnics. Each University had more staff, both advisory and support, than either Polytechnic. The ratio between Metropolis and Bigtown was 5:1, justified apparently neither by the former's larger student body, nor its smaller proportion of students studying vocational courses.

It is a pity, to say the least, that these discrepancies should exist. Care is taken to standardize the content and quality of academic courses to ensure no student is disadvantaged. It seems only fair that similar rigour should be applied to ensuring that students everywhere enjoy an equal chance of gaining information and advice which may influence their career choice and eventual employment. There may be a theoretical parity, summarized in maxims like 'we never turn a student away'. Realistically, however, unwelcoming premises, restricted information or sharp limitations on advisers' time must surely influence the effectiveness of any Service. This may even spur some resident students to prefer the Service in their home town during vacations. This is possible under the AGCAS Mutual Aid Scheme. Many students lacking this option may under-utilize their qualifications. In the long run, this has potential adverse consequences for the institution as well as its alumni, since the future fortunes of a department or

faculty will be to some degree influenced by where graduates go and how they feel about their destinations.

What seems called-for is a yardstick by which to judge the appropriateness of Services to their task. A statement of expectations about premises, staffing, information and even goals might usefully be formulated, preferably by a body composed of current practitioners. The Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services might fill such a role. At present, however, there seems no movement to encourage or implement such a proposal.

The profile of its Service reflects the image and importance an institution accords careers provision. A Service which looks down-at-heel suggests several things: that the institution considers vocational matters less important than educational ones; that students find good jobs unassisted; that it expects students to be resourceful and accordingly offers little assistance, or that it cares little for the fate of students after their studies. Only the second of these interpretations sounds at all reassuring, yet represents ostrich-like disregard. Institutions would do well to consider the possibly very negative effects on students of scant careers provision.

Let us now examine the ten research questions identified earlier, in the context of the four Higher Education Careers Advisory Services visited.

Students' Diagnoses of their Information Needs

How far any student may be considered capable of judging his information needs depends on how capable in this respect previous experiences and education have made him, and the amount of help towards

this available from his Careers Advisory Service. An attempt to assess the former may be made by examining careers education provision in state-sector schools. Given that this has improved considerably during the past decade or so, today's undergraduate seems likely to be more sophisticated in career decision-making than his predecessors. However, reservations in ascribing to new students decision-making maturity must be made. Firstly, state-school careers provision, while improved, is not perfect. Some schools consider it important for all pupils, encouraging the academically-able to regard it as earnestly as they do those leaving at sixteen. Contrastingly, other schools pay lip-service to careers work, but assume that anyone able to leap enough academic hurdles need not much concern themselves with vocational matters. Secondly, undergraduates from independent schools may not have enjoyed careers preparation comparable to their state-school counterparts, though an Independent Schools Careers Organisation exists, and the provision in some such schools is doubtless excellent. Thirdly, an increasing number of mature students are now represented at undergraduate level. They may have finished before the current fairly sophisticated careers provision became available. Fourthly, minority groups, such as overseas or handicapped students, may have different career concepts from most of their fellows. It is evident that, while many new-arrivals at University and Polytechnic have already laid a solid foundation on which to build career decisions, this is unlikely to be true of all.

At each of the University Careers Advisory Services examined, students were encouraged to make their own initial diagnoses. Information rooms containing abundant material about occupations, employers and further study and training were intended as the first port of call. Leaflets produced by each Service, and designed to facilitate the decision-making process, were also available. For instance, at Greenbelt University, students uncertain of how to start were able to consult

material fragmenting the task into recognisable and manageable steps. While the layout of both information-rooms was clarified by notices and maps, one Director of Service considered that students still needed guidance on finding and using information. At one University, students who had not previously visited the information room were introduced to it after their first interview. This introduced human contact and allowed students to ask questions. They seemed thereby more likely to use the system successfully, and require less staff help. The Service thus protected itself while serving its clients. Overall, however, Services seemed nervous about eliminating personal contact from any provision. Perhaps they considered undesirable any assistance not evidently part of the Service.

It is important to distinguish between finding information and using it. A student interested in accountancy may have no difficulty locating considerable independent and company literature. Its volume, however, may require judicious selection and reading. If this is not done, a student may survey much inconsequential material, and overlook vital information. It was stressed that students needed to recognise that many things likely to promote or deflate their interest in an organisation might not feature in its literature, and that to find them, personal contact or other avenues of enquiry might be necessary. However, the signs were encouraging. One Director of Service said that students in general recognised the kinds of information they needed, and were becoming more sophisticated. Another said that information diagnosis was no problem to students who knew what they wanted to do (which presumes good diagnostic procedures to reach that point). One Polytechnic Director of Service claimed that students on vocational courses tended to be better-informed than others. He explained this by reference to the work experience normally part of vocational courses.

Approximately two-thirds of that institution's students were on sandwich courses, so knowledge of work environment seemed likely to be refined.

The diagnostic process was not confined to examining literature. Questionnaire-style aids, like the APU and the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, and computer-based ones like the interactive version of CASCAID could, it was claimed help students recognise their interests and strengths, even where these related to previously unconsidered occupations. Their systematic nature was perhaps the major benefit of these diagnostic tools. This recommended them to advisers, since, it was claimed, many students' self-devised diagnoses were either unsystematic or unsophisticated. Because established, these aids were perhaps also more reassuring to students than their own formulations. Recognized systems, being credible both to adviser and client, create a foundation from which progress seems likely to be easier. For this reason, standardised tools of this kind might profitably be used with a large proportion of clients.

Despite having used careers education and guidance facilities at school, and the information and diagnostic aids offered at the institution, many students still consulted careers advisers. A proportion did so because uncertain of what to do after graduating. One of the two University Services offered such students half-hour consultations, with the option of the customary one-hour session at a later date. One Director commented that these students often seemed ignorant not only of the stages of vocational awareness or guidance which advisers and some other students recognised, but also of the selection procedures which employers adopted. Disappointing as advisers appeared to find this, it made it possible to impress upon students good diagnostic procedures, and perhaps encourage further contacts. It was recognised that some students required even basic diagnostic work to

be done through personal communication, an observation reflected in the comments of the careers information officers consulted. Only Greenbelt University appeared to have attempted to advertise the needs which interviews could answer, and to distinguish between long diagnostic interviews and shorter, problem-solving ones.

In interviews with students, advisers seemed usually to accept at face value students' expressed career plans. This was good insofar as it showed respect for clients' knowledge and decision-making abilities. However, the students, like anyone else, may have been subject to influences they were barely aware of. Nevertheless, any serious exploration of their motives might have been cumbersome for advisers, and one reported resistance and even hostility from some students when having taken that approach. This might have been overcome by diagnostic tools, such as Gradscope and Cascaid-HE, which explore motivation. If, in the course of discussion, an adviser felt serious reservations about a client's choice, he was likely to express it. It was generally agreed that no dismantling exercise was normally necessary to make students receptive to information. Respect for the adviser's knowledge, awareness of their own relative ignorance, and recognition of the investigative process being important to their lives and careers, were said to contribute in varying degrees to students' receptivity.

Lakeside Polytechnic's careers information officer had devised a questionnaire due for implementation the following academic year. Its purpose was to assess the views and needs of final-year students regarding the Service's careers provision. The feedback from this would hopefully be revealing both about students' expectations and their views of themselves and their own level of vocational sophistication. Because Higher Education institutions vary, each Service must assess the needs of its student body, not rely entirely on published material which

suggests general trends only.

Though one University's careers information room was very attractive, many students did not spend long there, often only collecting leaflets and booklets for perusal elsewhere. This had the appearance of conscientious research, yet Greenbelt University's careers information officer was sceptical, feeling that many students did this as a conscience-salver. By stocking up with material, and having visited the Service, they could, it was claimed convince themselves and others that they had 'done something about careers'. A surprising side-issue from this (possibly true) interpretation, was that no mention was made of students having come with this intention being enticed by the fine facilities to return later and use them more fully. Possibly they did. It poses the question of whether students were shy of exhibiting concern for their futures. Might they have even been hesitant to admit their concern to themselves? A Service strategy to reduce anxiety about career choice and transition to work may be necessary. Otherwise, camouflage behaviour of the kind instanced may prevent clients receiving the help they need.

Curiously, no suggestion was made that suitable work for a graduate might be approached through exploratory jobs. A seemingly unchallenged notion even among advisers was that the 'right' job was available to anyone on graduation. This suggested that the 'crystallization' stage of career awareness which Ginzberg (1951) talks about had been reached by all students aged twenty or twenty-one. Though his research is nearly forty years old, Ginzberg's ceiling of twenty-five for normal crystallization does not appear to be challenged by the practices of Higher Education Careers Advisory Services. However, students may be being asked to make major limiting decisions before the full burgeoning of their career awareness. Such encouragement may not be reflected

elsewhere. There is value in encouraging students not to think of career decision-making as they might final examinations - as one big test following long (or last-minute) preparations. Puncturing the notion of finality which shrouds it may have several beneficial effects: dispel guilt and anxiety among those finding difficulty deciding; reduce exploratory hackwork by encouraging thinking around general activities rather than particular jobs, and prevent people stepping on occupational treadmills too soon. No interviewee spoke of clients needing time for information to 'sink in', to influence awareness or inclination. Early preparation was encouraged apparently in relation more to keeping deadlines than allowing time for psychological processes.

Careers information and education in schools place considerable weight on external influences such as the family and peer group. These appear disregarded in Higher Education, yet it seems improbable that students are entirely uninfluenced by them. While most are considered unsusceptible to blinkered views, they may still be vulnerable to poor advice, especially if this is well-meant and convincingly-argued. Not even students who have researched assiduously necessarily reject mistaken views. This bolsters the argument for careers education programmes which at least point out the dangers of inexpert received opinion. Ensuring knowledge is about not only providing correct material, but also guarding against misleading influences. Services strive to provide the former, but appear indifferent to the latter. However, the good work they do may be undone by others. Greater recognition of this, and action combatting it, are needed.

Criteria for Selecting Careers Information Material

The interviewees were unanimous in their view that the criteria for selecting careers information depends on the user and on his actual or intended use of it. There are three principal user-groups: careers advisers, careers information officers and students. Selection may mean different things to each of them. It was pointed out that the adviser may want material only briefly - for instance, for reference during an interview; an information officer may want material which is visible and durable; a student may want items he can take away. Such preferences relate not only to its content, but to the material's format and 'packaging' too. A problem for careers information publishers is to produce items which satisfy all three groups. Sometimes the only solution appears to be to produce different versions of the same thing. Selection criteria pertaining to the three user groups seem best examined in relation to each in turn.

A feature of careers information which advisers welcomed was comprehensiveness. In dealing with clients, advisers more easily found the details they needed if these were available at one source. Accordingly, they liked directories, and ROGET, in particular, was mentioned. A particular advantage of directories was said to be their concentration of relevant information; advisers did not have to plough through irrelevancies before finding what they wanted. Albeit in an American context, Pryor and Pincham (1986) found compendia the single source most favoured by advisers.

Advisers were careful to select information which was current. One, however, pointed out that their perception of this might be more generous than that of less knowledeable students. They, he said, might be inclined to disregard material published only a year or two before.

While some such information might properly be regarded with suspicion, much need not be. The adviser's ability to discriminate between the two was seen as an asset which could make available extra information and save time. It is in the Careers Advisory Services' interests to retain information items until no longer reliable. Contrastingly, commercial publishers' interests lead them to promote regularly-revised material. These rivalling interests are to a degree reconciled by AGCAS, which publishes a range of informative careers booklets mentioned already. Larger single items, however, are entrusted mostly to commercial publishers. Their cost may in time result in printed directories giving way to computer databases capable of being updated at any time.

Three hallmarks of quality in occupational material were cited. One was a good description of typical activities of those doing the work in question. Without this, students might be left with only a vague idea of a job. A second essential was a clear statement of entry routes. This had to make clear distinctions where more than one route was available and application methods and deadlines were vital, particularly where either was unusual. The third ingredient was advice on contacts within the profession. This was said to be particularly important, because entry to some jobs depended on making contact personally. Students ignorant of this might be hamstrung from the start. Another requirement, though pertinent only to company-produced information, was to state selection criteria. One adviser expressed concern that this was often omitted, giving an impression of entry to, or progress within an organisation being all plain saling. Presumably most students can recognise employer bias in company literature. However, correcting or supplementing it may be troublesome. Disappointingly, none of the four Services appeared to be encouraging employers to make company statements

more helpful to student job-seekers.

Objectivity was considered very desirable. This had popularized material produced by careers advisers, notably the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services - Graduate Careers Information Booklet Special Interest Series and Occupational Series. These numbered about seventy items covering occupations and topics most germane to graduate career decision-making. It was recognised, however, that advisers, like employers, had prejudices and limitations, perhaps originating in their own academic specialisms or employment. It was suggested that careers advisers producing information might sometimes write more for the consumption of professional colleagues than for the students constituting the majority readership. It was ventured that the 'academic style', as it was called, might prove less palatable than other kinds.

Bias may not be unhelpful - in fact, just the opposite. Provided the likely direction and possible degree of bias can be recognised, (by such as authorship or production-source) two things can be appreciated: a) that probably the best (or worst) aspects have been mentioned, and b) that it may be necessary to examine a similarly weighted account from the opposite viewpoint. A danger lies in missing the reality which falls between the two extremes. In endeavouring respectively to attract or repel the reader, the positive and negative accounts of an occupation may focus respectively on the very interesting or the very humdrum aspects, both neglecting job facets which fit neither category. However, most careers material does not fall into this trap, and biased accounts, because of the emphasis and colour with which the viewpoint is stated, are often more racy and enjoyable than apparently neutral material. Most readers may be intelligent enough to introduce their own scepticism without too much help from the author.

No mention was made of Services playing-down employer literature. However, this might be done. Perhaps employers and job-hunters currently engage in too hasty a selection procedures. Possibly insufficient recognition is paid to information sources besides literature. The likely additional trouble might be offset by better job-fits. Careers information officers imposed selection criteria supplementing rather than rivalling those of careers advisers. They had to take a wider view, since the material they selected had to satisfy both students and advisers. Because the information files they kept often included extractions from publications, information officers favoured materials lending themselves to this process. Those giving significant, concise, itemised information seemed preferred to extended ones written in a discursive style.

Where display space was limited, materials to fill it were chosen carefully. Quick to earn their places were items popular in the past. Even these, however, were kept under a watchful eye, and removed if little-used. Take-away materials or ones which the Service could afford to lose were also displayed. However, neither might be among the most interesting or useful held. The most accessible material may not be the most informative. However, easily obtaining it may discourage students from seeking other, possibly better, publications. Some literature mentions other sources, but most do not. The good arrangement of the two University information rooms, with clear demarcations, encouraged further exploration. At certain times of year, particular items enjoyed pride of place, particularly if the information they contained was not otherwise readily available. The graduate vacancy bulletins which appeared in the Summer term were an example.

Some received information was considered superfluous to Service requirements, but available elsewhere in the institution. One

information officer instanced how she regularly sent material to departments it was likely to benefit. This was often true of items whose contents were too specific or voluminous for useful inclusion in the careers library. However, no mention was made of academic departments passing literature helpful to Services. Such departmental initiative should be encouraged if Services are to house material fully reflective of industry and commerce.

There was a confessed temptation to select information because it fitted the established storage and retrieval system. Serious efforts were being made, however, to include only material which seemed likely to genuinely contribute to existing stock. Duplication was generally regarded as fruitless, and avoided - this amounting to a point of principle in one Service. The exception was very good material which might be missed unless placed in more than one location, since students' investigations took different routes. This was one of few recognitions of different students adopting distinctive approaches to career exploration. This general trend suggested that there was considered a 'right' way to approach careers information. This concept is helpful to organising careers libraries but perhaps not to serving individual needs. This is not to argue for haphazardness, merely to avoid undue emphasis to particular paths of exploration.

The investigation was not broad enough to admit student opinion directly. However, careers staff readily instanced students' selection criteria. It was claimed that they preferred information which was concise and to-the-point. Bigtown Polytechnic's adviser opined that many careers publications failed students by being too long and 'wordy', this being perhaps as much a matter of style as content.

Students were said also to prefer take-away information they could

read at their leisure to directory material they could examine only in the careers library. Except for the AGCAS booklet series, copies of which were free, most take-away items were single duplicated sheets or slim leaflets. For budgetary reasons, as well as popularity, this seemed desirable, though the expensive AGCAS booklets seemed an exception.

Probably the most popular single brand of information among student users were said to be the accounts of their early days in work written by former students. Readers seemed to trust what they said, and perhaps enjoyed the often comradely style used to express it, unmatched by professionally-written material. Such accounts had no obvious shortcoming, provided they were not relied-on entirely.

All four Services had to be selective, since the total material received by each was unwieldy. Nevertheless, both University information collections were impressive. One was being expanded by data on 'alternative careers, which fell within graduates' aspirations, yet not within traditional occupational categories. This usefully extended the perceived parameters of graduate employment. However, whether the currently high profile of certain occupations (such as environmental ones) is likely to be reflected in the job opportunities they give rise to, must be asked.

Problems of acquiring or presenting information could, directly or indirectly, influence selection. Lakeside Polytechnic's Service received a great deal of unsolicited material. This did not in itself earn it cursory treatment. However, requested material was more likely to attract staff's attention, particularly if they were under pressure. Some employers were said to target information, their selection of institutions being based sometimes on courses run there, but sometimes

solely on general reputation. This was considered unwise, employers possibly thereby missing good potential recruits elsewhere. It also risked some institutions being deluged with information, while others were left ignorant of opportunities. Any stout representation Services made on behalf of their neglected students was not mentioned. Perhaps none of the four selected suffered in this way. Neither, however, did they mention efforts to remedy such treatment elsewhere. This may have been offset by the many employers which all four Services canvassed automatically on an annual (and sometimes more frequent) basis. Lakeside's information officer was working on a database of employer addresses, while Greenbelt Service routinely maintained files on two hundred employees, and held basic information on three hundred others. This was impressive, but it was uncertain whether this provision was reflected in students' company knowledge expressed at selection interviews.

Budgetary factors influenced acquisition. Unfortunately, information officers were often unsure how much they could spend, which made constructive stock augmentation difficult. One information officer was pleased at the receptiveness of the Director to her requests to buy material she considered useful, but would have preferred to work from a set allowance than to negotiate each time. A possible consolation was the occasional freedom this allowed to buy what would, under a systematized approach, have been over-budget.

The Content of Careers Publications

> Career information can play a significant role in helping people understand their society. Career information describes what work is being done, where it is being done, what skills are needed, how it is valued by society, and the number of people in different occupations. It also tells us much about change in our society.

These words of Fredrickson (1984) should be memorized by any writer or publisher of careers information. He goes on to point out the importance such material can have in increasing respect for all types of work, and its potency as a puncturer of stereotypes.

Both careers advisers and information officers found it difficult to sift all the publications they received, especially those unsolicited. Comments from all four institutions suggested that the quality of material ranged from very good to bad.

The Greenbelt University adviser thought most company brochures good, both in text and presentation. He was unclear, however, whether their authors consulted Higher Education institutions about proposed contents or how best to present information. He felt that much company literature could profitably appeal more to values which he believed many students held, but which it rarely reflected. It was implied that these values were not monetary, yet not that they would be alien to recruitment literature, nor irreconcilable with profit-related motives and philosophies. This may be so. However, many students are doubtless influenced by financial motives as by altruistic or self-realisatory ones. For them, most company material may be fine as it is. Some organisations, however, may benefit from attracting a wider range of applicant through an appeal to values which humanize them. A student's work-related motivations may change during his time in Higher Education. This, too, argues for a balance in the material organisations produce, provided this does not weaken their image. Bachhuber (1988) says that information must present the adverse sides of jobs as well as the good ones. However, anything which does suggest imperfections may be significantly altered before gaining approval for production. It was claimed that even a director's whim could cause a lot of good information to be revised in the name of company interests.

As was said earlier, students often preferred to take away reading-matter than peruse it on Service premises. On any one occasion, they were likely to lift more than one item, and might 'load up' with many. They were said by Greenbelt's Information Officer to soon become bored with items resembling others of their kind. Advisers and information officers considered distinctiveness invited students' attention. This might profitably begin with the cover, but ought to continue inside. An easy-to-read contents page was considered an encouragement to the seriously-interested reader, while allowing the casual browser to pass onto something else, reassured that he had not missed something.

The same Information Officer considered that many organisations gave insufficient coverage of selection methods in their literature. These were often accorded cursory treatment or omitted altogether. Given the variety and rigour of some selection procedures, possibly entailing psychometric testing and groupwork problem-solving, this seemed a significant shortcoming. Individual Services felt themselves generally successful in overcoming this by holding 'debriefing' sessions with students who had been through selection processes, and enclosing their recorded experiences in the relevant employer file.

A Metropolis University adviser felt that while selection methods were often impressive or unstated, many organisations pitched their information too high. They appeared to seek or expect recruits possessing qualities rare among undergraduates. In some cases, this might have reflected less a lack of realism and more a wish to attract applicants sufficiently self-confident not to be deterred by elevated employer expectations. However, there was also a danger of its deterring capable undergraduates, whose self-image was tempered by modesty, and who (perhaps naively) expected recruiting organisations to mean what they said.

A Greenbelt University adviser expressed doubt about the sincerity of organisations extolling certain qualities, particularly those reflecting or suggesting individuality. Most junior employees, even those likely in time to attain responsible positions, have to fit into an established system before getting a real chance to introduce imagination or novelty. However valuable it can be, real individualism may not be as highly prized as appears, its invocation chiefly a means of attracting applicants. Whether this is as true of foreign-based companies operating in England as indigenous organisations, is uncertain. Bachhuber (1988) draws attention to the rarity with which employer literature addresses the issue of person-job fit, and points out that organisations could make themselves more attractive to applicants by including information on training and career development.

All four Services offered video facilities, and both Universities had sizeable cassette collections, but these had made little impact. Bigtown's adviser considered them 'grossly overrated', and suggested that they too often followed traditional advertising formats, resulting in a rather crude appeal to which students responded sceptically or derisively. The adviser at Lakeside, while concurring with this view, acknowledged the use of videos as a teaching device, particularly on topics of likely interest to most students, such as coping with interviews. Videos worked well in interview preparation, partly because of the apparent significance of interview performance, and partly their ability to soften through humour an otherwise serious subject. A clearer indication of whether videos were useful or merely enjoyable would have been helpful. There seems no reason why they could not be both, but no adviser mentioned specific ways in which students felt they had been led to a better interview performance.Students' comments, however, were taken before interviews, rather than after. Advisers commented on the

difficulty of presenting such material in an entertaining way without undue exaggeration. Some comments suggested that the more sophisticated videos are beginning to achieve this.

It had occasionally been possible for staff to detect improvements in publications produced regularly. The AGCAS information booklets were mentioned in this context. Previously, they had exhibited no strategy in the topics they covered. A piecemeal growth of the series had resulted in some important occupational areas remaining uncovered. This had been remedied with the thoughtful introduction of new titles. A second improvement was the series writers being themselves responsible for gathering the necessary information. Previously, the two tasks had been undertaken by different people. The new approach was claimed to have achieved a better balanced presentation, and to check stylistic or other biases. Finally, student destination information was also included in each booklet.

Student destination statistics were a valuable part of in-house materials. In endeavouring to inform, however, Services sometimes found it hard not to mislead, since bare entry figures did not explain why people had entered particular jobs, or define their precise level of work or responsibility. In some, especially large firms with a tradition of graduate recruitment, this could be gauged with some accuracy. However, many graduates entered firms lacking this history. Bigtown Polytechnic Service made a commendable attempt to reduce this difficulty by adopting three categories - 'related professional work', 'other professional-level work' and 'non-professional work' - by which to divide student feedback before introducing it to the relevant occupational file, or their statistics.

Services' computer-based information facilities attracted only

modest use, and had not reduced demand for traditional publications. This had been true of the CASCAID system at Greenbelt University. The PROSPECT system, currently being piloted at several Universities, may supplement or replace it. Early signs have been encouraging, but its seeming ease of use by students at pilot locations may be misleading. One of these has a strong technological bias, and most users may be more comfortable with the system than (say) the average non-technical student. Lakeside's adviser commented that using computer-based information systems often required (sometimes considerable) preliminary instruction - a potential difficulty in short-staffed Services. Also, a datapoint could only accommodate one user at a time. Ironically, a popular system might become synonymous with unavailability, and lose customers to more conventional resources. Operational methods and opportunity for use have to be gauged as carefully as the information stored. The possibility of placing databases at different campus locations was not mentioned, though it may represent at least a partial solution. This would also reduce the need to entice students to Service premises before making databases available to them. Judiciously-located databases might be a good form of Service advertising.

Some selection criteria became most obvious during stock review, which was most concentrated during the Summer. Consistency in selection seemed easier when substantial uninterrupted time was devoted to the job by a few people, than when a relatively brief task shared among many. Concentration also seemed to encourage stringency. Greenbelt's information officer said that during this time it became easier to see that attractive material was not always substantial. This was also a good time to check the age of publications. Judgements varied according to material, but three years was commonly regarded as the limit beyond which little of any published information should be considered reliable. Spare copies of publications were in most cases

retained only if likely to be used. Sometimes an automatic grace-period was accorded, after which unperused or (in the case of take-away leaflets) remaining material was removed and discarded. This depended largely on the availability of storage space. However, this alone did not facilitate retrieval and shelves were considered advisable. Greenbelt University Service's 'custom-built' storeroom offered substantial space for spares. Lakeside Polytechnic Service had no storeroom, but planned to devote to storage one of several soon-to-be-completed interview rooms. Storage space is important, since material may arrive before needed. Also, it is sometimes preferable to introduce bulk information all at once.

In-house literature was usually written to reflect the particular Service's provision, though sometimes to supplement, or bridge gaps in, externally-produced information. This was more evident in the University Services than in the Polytechnics'. The latter's staff shortage appeared to be part of the explanation, as did their having fewer services to which attention could be drawn. Staff wrote up in report-form information gleaned on visits to organisations, or at employer talks. These were normally placed in the relevant information file, occasionally being introduced elsewhere also if the material related to different occupations. One Polytechnic information officer claimed that advisers did not sufficiently record what they had learned, and some visits went unreported. She also praised nationally-produced self-help materials but felt that there was a place for more in-house material. Usefulness was the touchstone, and care should be taken to ensure that in-house materials neither duplicate existing material nor are produced only as image-promoters. Establishing identity is less important than provision, since each Service is unrivalled on campus, at least during term-time.

How Knowledgeable Need Careers Advisers Be?

Perhaps because of the abundant careers information and variety of requests careers advisers have to deal with, some seem to be regarded as repositories of all knowledge. However, advisers unanimously agreed that encyclopaedic careers knowledge was unnecessary to their functioning fully effectively. One even claimed that a kind of Parkinsonian law operated, whereby information was requested in proportion to knowledge shown. While successful interviewing and sustained credibility depended partly on their having relevant knowledge, advisers considered it normally more constructive to show a student how to obtain information rather than offer him it. This was intended to promote self-reliance, and ensure that students themselves discovered what they wanted to know, rather than learning only what their particular adviser happened to be familiar with.

Advisers considered that what knowledge they possessed had been acquired and cemented through repetition. Familiarity, however, seemed likely to be affected by the number of occupations with which they were expected to be familiar. Broad though this range might be, it was unlikely to include non-graduate-level jobs. Metropolis University's Service so divided responsibilities that any single adviser dealt mainly with enquiries relating to a specific field, or with students from a particular faculty or department. This enabled advisers to become better acquainted with specific occupations than their generalist counterparts elsewhere. The generalists, however, may have been readier to advocate student self-help, while the specialists may have displayed their knowledge, not necessarily to the benefit of interviewees. Advisers might also have felt obliged to give clients their 'money's worth'. Information may have taken longer to give than strictly necessary because of a perceived obligation to cover it with a

professional wrapping. Any apprehension advisers felt may have been unjustified, since they may have been judged by the standards they presented than in relation to ideals of which clients seemed unlikely to have concepts.

Bigtown Polytechnic's adviser found difficulty of reserving time to read careers information. Metropolis University's adviser, however, said that he and his colleagues sometimes sat down to study information, especially on areas where they knew they lacked knowledge (though how they became aware of this was not clear). Both Polytechnic and University advisers seemed more concerned to secure their existing knowledge than extend it. However, even in small advisory teams, some specialist knowledge was expected, and some study necessary for all advisers. Knowledge was spoken of as having to be acquired deliberately rather than accumulating through doing the job. This might have resulted from individual Higher Education advisers being more isolated than their LEA counterparts, whose working situations promote contact.

Knowledge of the careers information room was considered essential. Advisers had to be sure that material would be available when they needed it, or referred students to it. They had to be familiar with stock, and the contents and organisation of the information room itself had to be good. This depended on the conscientiousness of both careers advisers and information staff. At the Greenbelt Service, responsibility for the annual revision of careers files was accorded proportionally; at Metropolis, advisers dealt only with stock covering their particular specialism. The latter approach was said to improve their acquaintance with the material they most needed. Stock review gave insufficient opportunity for staff to familiarise themselves with the content of publications. However, the Polytechnic advisers, unlike their University

counterparts, did not appear to make this a separate exercise. This may have been offset by their working in smaller premises, being closer to colleagues, and thereby finding information exchange easier. It was encouraging that though each Service had an information officer, the system's maintenance was not left entirely to them.

Advisers said that colleagues were useful informal sources of information. Metropolis University's Service, however, took a formal approach to information exchange, running sessions in which individual advisers made presentations to colleagues. These were considered useful not only for the material offered, but for the change it offered advisers to quiz one another and debate important points. Formality may be even more important in smaller Services, where advisers are less likely to be specialists.

A good deal of locally and nationally-relevant information was acquired through visits to organisations. Services accepted most firms' offers to visit, and the personal contacts thereby established were regarded as very valuable. It was good that careers advisers were not entirely reliant on literature, since this could prove inaccurate within only months of publication. One adviser commented on the speed of information change, and that personal contacts ensured quick, reliable updating. It was unclear whether this constituted a good use of time. Attendance was frequently in groups, rather than advisers acquiring information singly and passing it to colleagues. This was doubly questionable, given that most visits were to local organisations, yet most graduates were unlikely to confine their job-seeking to the locality. Moreover, few students seemed likely to request detailed information on any particular local employer.

Careers advisers had to be aware of the information needs of departments. Usually, a nominated member of staff in each one dealt with

careers matters pertinent to it. However, most of them had no experience of careers work, and needed some help. Advisers had to know what careers activities took place in the departments for which they were responsible, and how well the nominated staff members were fulfilling their duties. Varying degrees of efficiency and enthusiasm were evident, but advisers in Bigtown Polytechnic were especially grateful for the work which this provision diverted from them, leaving them time to see students whose needs exceeded the capacities of departmental staff. At Bigtown, courses were run for departmentmental contacts, to ensure their familiarity with essential information. Each incumbent occupied this role for a period of three years, normally. This was considered long enough to become good at the job, but the stipulated period prevented the permanent incumbency of poor representatives.

Information appeared to give advisers little cause for concern. All advisers claimed to possess knowledge equal to most situations. However, in many cases clients were referred to sources of information rather than being provided with facts. Moreover, the bulk of many interviews, particularly those not first consultations, entailed evaluating information according to individual needs and preferences. While the advisers could not operate without information, they acted more as analysts of it than providers. This seemed the most proper use of their expertise.

While nominally not expected to be conversant with detailed occupational information, careers information officers in practice were. One claimed to be probably as knowledgeable about it as any of her adviser colleagues. All frequently received information requests from students. One officer never answered these directly, partly to avoid risk of error, but partly to discourage dependence. Another, in a smaller Service, found herself at times obliged to give occupational

information, since frequently no adviser was available. However, she tried to read most information which arrived, and at the end of each week went over with the Service Director any enquiries which had caused difficulty during it. This appeared to work well, and she claimed her knowledge had increased markedly. All information officers were careful not to answer queries they felt beyond their competence. However, Lakeside Polytechnic's Information Officer claimed that only with the recent development of a regional Information Officers' training group had formal training become reality. Before that, learning had been mostly on-the-job. That which had not, she said, could have better recognised the informational demands often placed on Information Officers. These nominal limitations on careers officers' responsibilities pose two questions: are they being used too cautiously, and does their confined role reflect too exalted a picture of advisory skills? These questions will be taken up in the section on the Status of Careers Information Staff.

Advertisements for careers adviser posts rarely stipulate a careers qualification. This suggests that guidance skills are not well-defined, not hard to acquire, or both. This is not reflected by local education authority careers officer recruitment. They must have completed not only a one-year full-time postgraduate diploma course, but also a one-year probationary period, during which frequent and varied assessments of their performance are made by experienced and senior members of staff. The contrast is the more remarkable since Higher Education advisory work seems ubiquitously considered more prestigious than that in the secondary and tertiary sectors, an opinion emphatically underlined by the higher salaries typically attached to it. Perhaps guidance skills are not seen as particularly specialized or difficult to acquire, only as lending themselves to problematizing. Careers information may actually be considered more valuable to master, but,

because this seems relatively straightforward, is rarely a focus of debate and therefore not treated as important.

The desirability of industrial experience is often cited in these advertisements. In offering guidance within a specific occupational field, experience of it may be very valuable; however, most advisers assist students of widely-varying ambitions. However deep or extensive, one person's experience is unlikely to be of more than limited help. Possibly applicants unfamiliar with careers work are sometimes preferred because they arrive with few preconceptions of the work, and may be more easily moulded than someone whom experience has led to strong opinions. Might Services prefer newcomers unlikely to 'rock the boat'? In work requiring adaptability and, hopefully, imagination, this may not be a wise approach.

The Information Calendar

An emphatic message from advisers was that they and employers alike were driven by students' needs. Despite this, there appeared to be mismatches between the need for information, and its availability. A complaint of staff at Bigtown Polytechnic's Service was that they rarely received the information they needed at the right time. Some employers (the Civil Service and major accountancy firms, in particular) were cited as excelling in producing material on-schedule and in abundance. Others, however, geared their information output just to precede recruitment in the Spring or early Summer, rather than some months earlier, when many students were making important choices. This practice might have influenced many students to postpone their job-hunting. However, problems arising from this could not all be laid at employers' doors. Some publishers were accused of producing items too

late to be of maximum help, prejudicing students' information-seeking and, in turn, the work of advisers.

Contrastingly, some employers wanted to 'get in early'. They, ironically, had to be dissuaded, to give students the time they needed to make career decisions. Information targeted at second-year students in their Summer term, for instance, was considered unlikely to attract much attention. Many students seemed so confident of getting a job as to postpone not only their applications, but even information-hunting, until after final exams. At one University, an on-campus interview programme was introduced because so many students were postponing the whole process. Students might be encouraged to view selecting a career and choosing a job as different exercises. Services might promote the first but allow students to decide on the timing of the second. Choosing a career is likely to take longer than choosing potential employers, and best not left until after graduation.

Surprisingly, 'Milk Round' organisations, which spent money sending representatives to institutions, sometimes stinted on company literature. Some seemed to expect Services to use such material for reference only, and sent very little. This often proved unsatisfactory to students, who wanted copies to take away. This was one facet of a larger criticism - that employers rarely consulted Services or students about their needs. This seemed a serious shortcoming, and one for which Careers Advisory Services may profitably initiate a remedy. During the 'Milk Round', when employers are on campus, might be a good time to approach them about this.

Bigtown Polytechnic's adviser said that better training was sometimes available at small companies than large ones. The characteristic absence of formality and highly-structured progress were compensated

by the opportunity to get to know staff better and become involved in a wider range of activities. Students, he said, often undervalued small companies in this respect, according undue attention to the larger, high-profile organisations. Because small firms recruited graduates only occasionally, he added, it was more likely they did so with good reason, with consequent benefits to trainees. Whether the selection methods they adopted differed from those used elsewhere was unclear, though it was suggested that they prized individuality in applicants rather than conformity to company image.

Services tried to organise other necessary activities around pressing student demands and employer campus occupation. Two major tasks were typically attempted during the Autumn term: organising talks by diverse employers to present a broad occupational sample, and the sorting and evaluation of reports solicited from ex-students in their early days of employment. Spring brought the 'Milk Round' or similar on-campus selection and recruitment activities, around which interview skills sessions were often run. In the Summer, time had to be reserved for the information file review, frequently involving advisers as well as information staff. Where possible, bulk information delivery was staggered to facilitate its introduction to the system.

Part of the information calendar, such as the compilation of student destination statistics, is necessarily retrospective, while part is forward-looking, such as advance ordering of information. Doubtless to the regret of careers staff, the constituent tasks of careers information work lack clear demarcations. They seem almost inevitably characterised by approximation and overlap. Perhaps Services were making a rod for their own backs. If they were to highlight more activities at different points of the year, students' behaviour might alter, facilitating Services' work. This should not overlook client

needs, but, given the four Services' claims of pressure of work, experimentation appeared justified.

Client-Contact Record Systems

Client-contact record-keeping varied probably more than any other single activity examined in the survey. Perhaps this should be no surprise, sparsely-staffed Services presumably devoting less time to this than those with a respectable complement. Moreover, record-keeping lacks a strong tradition throughout careers work. In many schools, records are well-kept, and those of local authority Careers Services are frequently detailed and meticulous. However, in the further Education sector, they may be non-existent, not through negligence, but because very high careers staff-student ratios make them pointless. The approach to record-keeping therefore varies considerably in Higher Education Services. The boundaries may be drawn by comparing the approaches of Metropolis University's Service and Bigtown Polytechnic's Service from the four under scrutiny.

For each interviewee, the Metropolis Service completed a four-sided, A4-size record document, together with an attached passport-size photograph which most students supplied on request. The record-sheet held educational and personal details, plus sometimes extensive comments by advisers after first, and possibly subsequent, interviews. These comments might include impressions or judgements as well as factual statements regarding what was discussed or the student's intentions. The record-sheet was held in the relevant adviser's room, and resorted-to as necessary, a colour-coded system facilitating retrieval. The record-sheet system was deemed justified since 60-70% of first interviewees

consulted an adviser again. It was said also to be helpful when dealing with students who had had unplanned, and sometimes lengthy, absences from the University. The way in which this information was conveyed suggested strong commitment to the records system. However, questioning a student at each contact seemed an adequate alternative. The Admissions Office, academic departments or personal tutors may have proved sufficient when trying to assist students whose lives or career plans were complex. As it was, a lot of written records seemed superfluous.

Bigtown's record format invited brevity. A card offered space for essential educational and personal details, and short statements relating to guidance. As with the University Service, the perceived need for record-keeping was related to request or need for subsequent action. Since a significantly smaller percentage of Polytechnic than University students consulted their Service more than once, the argument for extensive record-keeping was considered weaker. A danger of the Service occasionally lacking client details was acknowledged, but, it was argued, students could probably furnish any information the adviser needed. With only one full-time adviser in the Service, however, the brevity of records may have reflected time-pressure as much as anything.

Greenbelt had adopted a system lying between these extremes. A card index system was in use, having, however, only recently supplanted a less manageable predecessor. Through an easily-maintained coding system, these cards denoted any student contact. These proved useful time-savers in determining whether to allocate students one-hour or half-hour interview slots. (No other Service appeared to use records to determine interview time-allocation, despite the time-saving potential of doing so.) The card also indicated attendance at any workshop sessions run by the Service designed to sharpen application and interview

skills, particularly. A third use was statistical, for general record and survey purposes, as well as ensuring balanced adviser workloads. Computerization of the card system was anticipated. Interestingly, the need for record-keeping had become more urgent following the Service's relocation to a more attractive and visible setting.

No Service had adopted an action-plan statement for students, though at one this was considered a potentially helpful introduction. The two main reasons for record-keeping in local authority Careers Services appear to be to ensure accuracy, since clients' recollections of previous contacts may be hazy, and to forestall risk of unemployment or unsuitable work, training or study in initiating contact with them. This did not apply in any of the Services examined. None of them used records to initiate contact with individual students.

An unmentioned but possible use of individual student records would be as a means of illustrating to interviewees the paths of their own careers-search. This might be especially helpful with students whose exploratory routes meandered unduly. The purpose, however, would not be to straighten the path, necessarily, but to plot the journey so far, and determine the most promising next step. The difference in record-keeping practice among the Services suggested the approach was too assiduous in some quarters, too cursory elsewhere. Perhaps the best tests of records are whether they are referred-to, and whether satisfactory alternatives to them exist. With the exception of Greenbelt, no Service appeared to have addressed the issue seriously despite its resource-saving potential.

The Informational Function of Visitors

'Visitors', in this context of this survey, usually meant employers. Those recruiting to contact students, or invited by Services to do so, usually effected this in one of two ways. They either 'set up their stall' at one of the conventions or exhibitions now commonplace Spring and Summer campus events, or gave scheduled talks to students likely to be interested in their organisation, or the occupation it represented.

Both forms of contact were admitted to be useful, but reservations were expressed. Bigtown's adviser said that representatives at scheduled talks were often public relations generalists, rather than specialists in graduate occupations. For audiences composed mainly of student specialists, for instance, in science or technology, presentation material was sometimes insufficiently precise, and questions went unanswered. Another problem was of presenters promoting their own organisation rather than using it to illustrate the occupation it represented. This comment was echoed by a University adviser, who said, however, that similar past problems had been overcome by the Service and employers discussing presentations in advance. These exchanges were often valuable, since representatives needed to be shown how their image-consciousness could be combined with giving students what they wanted. One adviser commented that, from a student perspective, an organisation's image transmitted by its representatives constituted major information. Students were comfortable or otherwise seeing themselves like the presenters, and gauged this through dress, manner, voice, humour and other personal features. How clear students were of the image they wanted, or that the image they perceived accurately reflected the organisation, was uncertain. Bigtown's adviser expressed regret that most students were too unsophisticated to make useful contact with presenters. This perhaps argues for the latter being as

young as possible, though they might not possess detailed knowledge. However, two or more presenters, one of them a recent graduate, at such sessions, might be a solution.

One Service was at pains to balance the representation of private sector employers with public sector opportunities. Most of the former had made representations to the Service, while most public sector speakers had been sought by the Service itself. Some public sector employers, such as the Civil Service, offered a broad range of well-established opportunities, and were the source of valuable information for audiences of up to a hundred or more. Perhaps too much should not be made of attendance figures, though low turn-outs could constructively encourage organisations to reconsider their image within Higher Education. This might happen where an organisation was stereotyped in many students' minds, or a local firm's image had been impoverished, perhaps through socially or politically contentious circumstances.

Services thought that most employers preferred careers fairs to single addresses. The former allowed them to make meaningful contact with more students, and students seemed more disposed to discuss prospects with them there. These contacts were even used as 'screening' interviews, information about each enquirer being noted.

Departmental Provision of Careers Information

Fredrickson (1984) says that:

> Careers information should be used not only in counseling and in career education, but also in program planning and curriculum development. Accurate, up-to-date information about the educational and occupational world can provide a solid, cost-effective basis for the revision of exciting courses, the addition of new courses and programs, and the discontinuation of others.

In the last clause of this comment, Fredrickson perhaps illustrates why careers education and information programmes have met with poor response in some academic quarters. With justice, he also points out that:

> Giving priority to career goals usually has a strong influence on academic motivation and classroom performance.

As already said, one means to departmental involvement in providing careers information was a nominated member of staff acting as a link with the Careers Advisory Service, and triggering certain information provision initiatives. This proved helpful to Services in giving them a specific person to deal with, as well as a mouthpiece for the Service itself. However, not all departmental nominees were equally enthusiastic, nor could even the most committed among them always rely on support from immediate colleagues.

The most basic departmental help offered in respect of careers information was concessionary. Typically, this included notice-board space for posters advertising Service provision, notifications of vacancies, careers fairs, employer talks, etcetera. It included allocating for careers advisers a time-slot to address students about careers matters, and to remind them of Service facilities. The effectiveness of these surely depended partly on the fanfare departments accorded them. There was no particular evidence of departments heralding or following-up such presentations. However, the number of students visiting Services suggested at least no active disparagement of careers activities or the Services themselves.

Certain departments, however, proved willing to extend this basic accommodation. Metropolis University and Bigtown Polytechnic advisers cited the departments of Engineering, Education, Law and Architecture

as particularly co-operative and willing to take initiatives. Programmes of visits, field trips and presentations had all been initiated by them. Notably, these departments offered courses preparatory to specific cases, rendering careers initiatives, while desirable, possibly less necessary than in departments where courses were not vocationally-specific. Advisers remarked on the irony of it being those departments whose students might most need help which were often least interested in responding to Service initiatives or taking their own. It was suggested that some departments were concerned at the growth of the 'enterprise culture', and nervous of career considerations conflicting with academic values. However, it did not appear impossible for departments to promote students' employment prospects without scholastic compromise. Moreover, the health and repute of any subject in academic circles might depend on whether its graduates found appropriate, agreeable employment.

Building careers modules into academic programmes could reduce work for Services, and raise career awareness among students. However, these could hardly constitute part of an assessed academic programme. When obligation to be present and incentive to perform well are removed, student attendance is likely to drop, perhaps steeply. There is also a risk of resentment and dismissiveness towards Service provision if departmental careers activities (some or all of which may have been performed by non-Service staff) are uninspiring.

Two other initiatives espoused by many departments were work experience and interview practice. Most appeared to help in arranging these, but it was unclear whether preparatory activities were offered to help students benefit most from these, or whether 'debriefing' took place to see whether sessions had been beneficial. As in sandwich

courses, work experience was often an integral part of study. Students usually acquired valuable information not only about their placement organisation, but about many fairly universal work norms and practices. Such placements often lasted several months or even a year. As little as a week or two in an organisation was said to be very valuable for students whose study was entirely campus-based. Many students appeared to feel they needed interview practice - hardly surprisingly, since their only previous one was probably for a place on their course. Most departments seemed ready to acknowledge their lack of expertise in this area, making it a fruitful exercise for Services.

However, schooling students in interview techniques suggests a) that there are 'right' ways to behave at interviews, and b) that these skills are impartable. Neither premise may be correct. Some applicants may impress through inimitable personal characteristics; others through particularly receptive interviewers. There are points worth observing in interviews, but these are fairly general. Most job-hunting undergraduates could probably compose a good inventory of interview 'dos' and 'don'ts'. What they cannot do as easily, is assess the effect of their behaviour on others. Mock interviews which raised students' awareness of their appearance or behaviour might be very helpful. Advisers may hesitate to make direct recommendations - in fact, doing so might be counter-productive, given the subjectivity of judgements in any such exercise.

The Status of Careers Information Staff

The careers information officers consulted were unanimous in considering status the most pressing issue facing them as a group. They expressed considerable feeling about this, prompted by several factors. Status in this context was viewed principally in terms of salary level, but also range of activities and self-determination of work-schedule. They said that their colleagues appeared to respect their function and found them useful.

A major source of dissatisfaction were the discrepancies in their status among institutions. Although the work of information officers in different Services appeared essentially the same, this was not reflected in pay-levels. The clerical grades on which some were employed suggested they were seen as ancillary staff, while the academic grades enjoyed by officers elsewhere implied that their work was professional. The resentment and embarrassment to which this gap appeared to have given rise were not spurious, since the salary differences were in some cases several thousand pounds.

All the information officers interviewed were graduates, only a slight exaggeration of the national picture. Most had qualifications pertinent to the work they did, again reflecting the broader scene. This was argued to strengthen the case for consistency, since graduate entrants to other occupations could expect this.

While some advisers appeared appreciative of their information officer's work, not all were. Many advisers were said to have no idea of the information side of their Service's provision, being content to maintain small ready-reference systems within their own rooms. This meant them having even less contact with information staff than otherwise, leading, it was claimed, to an ignorance of, and possibly lack of

sufficient respect for, what they did.

Careers information officers had few opportunities for structured training. Much of what was received was 'ad hoc', and largely dependent on the goodwill and effort of careers advisers, particularly directors of Services. Whereas advisers could cover for one another's professional absences, information officers found it difficult to attend conferences or training sessions, being unique in their Services and less easily spared. Officers felt that this inhibition limited the level of communication possible and skill acquirable. They also said it did nothing to alleviate the sense of isolation which they sometimes felt. However, the plea for training did not readily identify useful extra skills likely to be so imparted. Perhaps training courses were suggestive of expertise in fact already acquired than actual means to it. This is a strong argument for standardised formal training. The present situation suggests that some Information Officers do not receive needed training while others receive it both formally and informally. More even input could be introduced by the regional training groups.

Such a move was already afoot. One Information Officer was making efforts to reduce the sense of isolation. She had organised thrice-yearly meetings for information officers based in the region. These acted as a forum for information issues, and to promote communications and, where possible, consistent practice. Her initiative was being reflected at national level, with information officers establishing a greater presence in AGCAS information sub-groups and working parties.

A clear definition and recognition of what constitutes each of the core elements of careers work - guidance, education and information - would be helpful. This would invite a rigorous evaluation of each, possibly even resulting in a change in relative status. A clearer

division might make it harder to neglect any single element and ensure that new conceptual approaches to the work were reflected in all practices, rather than selectively. The vested interest of in-house values might, however, prejudice the exercise unless checks were introduced. A survey by neutral experts might be an answer. This could encourage inter-Service links, and perhaps an additional role for the professional body, AGCAS. However, significant co-operation by Services would be necessary. Provided they were not unduly jealous of their own provision and methods, many might benefit by aiding independent scrutiny of this kind. Genuine training needs might be identified and in time satisfied if common shortcomings were prioritised.

Self-Advertisement by Careers Advisory Services

One major factor in the self-advertisement of Services - their location - was, unfortunately, rarely within their control. However, the situation of a Service could significantly influence the number of students consulting it. As already said, one Service's volume of business increased markedly with relocation to attractive, visible premises contrasting with its previous down-at-heel location. Sadly, two of the four Services in the survey had premises more resembling the latter than the former.

As also stated, advisers' visits to departments clarified their Service's functions, and showed students how to help themselves as well as benefit from established provision. These visits were often pre-figured or buttressed with materials produced by the Service itself, displayed on the Service premises and within departments. However, these notices tended to be 'wordy', and it was uncertain whether students actually read them. More generally, it must be asked whether students

exposed to Service advertisement felt greater urgency about career decisions or more seriously about how their Service might help. They might, of course, have gained the first without the second.

Sending letters to individual students was also resorted-to. Greenbelt University Service sent several, each aimed at every student in a particular academic year, and geared to their likely needs. First-years received a friendly, low-key introduction, final-year students something more urgent.

At the beginning of each academic year, one University Service placed a display in the main library. Usually, this differed little from departmental or Service premises displays, but acted as a further reminder to students of the help available.

In Lakeside Polytechnic, a vacancy bulletin, published every two weeks, was sent to every department. This ensured that information was available to students without visiting the Service - a device probably helpful in keeping client numbers manageable, particularly in the Summer term.

It was considered by some that more could have been done. Lakeside Polytechnic's information officer felt that second-year students were relatively neglected, and that the range of occupational talks could have been extended. However, more than one Service advocated caution. This suggested a fear that good advertising might excite more business than could be handled. This might explain the relative 'neglect' of certain groups. However, this seemed a curious response, since evidence of extra work might have argued for extended resources. It is one thing to streamline existing practices, another to turn a blind eye to possible needs. Perhaps the Service had cause to believe no extra provision would be forthcoming.

Initiatives were not always successful. One Service had attempted year-group open days, but had encountered little enthusiasm. One Polytechnic was considering an idea which had already achieved encouraging results at a neighbouring University (not included in the survey). This involved having a student careers representative in each department - someone familiar with the Service who promoted it within his academic group. This seemed useful as an unthreatening way for hesitant students to find out what the Service could offer them.

A major problem cited in association with self-advertisement was how easily media messages could distort the truth of such as graduate destinations or prospects. A prominent newspaper article or television item could, it was said, throw students into large-scale panic or lull them into torpor. Combatting such influence was said to be very difficult. Perhaps Careers Advisory Services should adopt a higher profile to combat and even denounce media statements they consider misleading. This, however, should be done judiciously, in the interests of credibility.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

From the evidence of the investigation, it appeared that much commendable information work was taking place in Higher Education Careers Advisory Services. There also appeared room for considerable improvement. This chapter identifies potentially the most beneficial changes and additions, recognising that the adoption of any recommendation will depend on a Service's existing practices, and the constraints acting upon it. It also highlights factors likely to influence future information provision. These need not be elements of supply or presentation - a reminder that the use and effectiveness of information are partly (and sometimes crucially) dependent on other considerations and on staff's own views of their role and its significance.

A fuller recognition of what information includes and how aspects of it are inter-related would be valuable. Often it appeared to be seen as separate from the main thrust of Service activities. This under-representation contributes to the impression of Service provision as a collection of parts rather than a seamless whole. This conveys a distorted picture and possibly an inferior image. Information needs to be drawn into the mainstream of guidance work. Doing this might usefully be part of a larger effort to establish a canon of recommendations forming a yardstick of good practice. This might help flatten the variables between Services, some of which relate to information, and are considerable. An integral part of such a canon should be formal establishment of what Careers Advisory Services owe students, and, by implication, what part information should play in this.

Several changes might be made in careers literature, particularly recruitment material. This often emphasises organisation image and omits information more likely to assist students. It might also make more appeal to values apparently held by many students but rarely reflected in material. This might make an organisation attractive to a wider range of students. Nor should appeal to minority groups, such as mature or handicapped students, be forgotten. Publishers of non-recruitment material might try to help students compare occupations in respects likely to influence choice. This would reduce the searching currently necessary to find such as average graduate starting salaries in different jobs. That much careers information is unstandardised further urges this change. Such provision might also encourage students to form a short-list of desirable occupations rather than whittle their choice to one which may not prove easy to enter.

Improvements are needed in the way graduates recognise and pursue relevant information. Employers' comments on their lack of preparation apparent at interviews, and Services' evidence on the aimless way in which some students collect material support this. Better guidelines on how to use information might be helpful for Services to produce. Among these might be how different facilities can be useful for different purposes, or appeal to different people. Self-help might even be encouraged by painting working life more attractively as an idea. Some Services, however, needed to be made aware that supplying materials was not enough. Clients sometimes had to be helped to help themselves, and careers education often had to precede careers information-seeking activity for the latter to be useful. More communication with academic departments appeared worth attempting in some Services.

Careers advisory interviews were not unaffected by information considerations. Services might operate more efficiently by encouraging

students to research information before consulting advisers. Those who like detective-work might be encouraged to use computer information sources. Those preferring to relate information to a human face might attend talks, or arrange visits to employers. Services might usefully advertise that they cater for different personalities, not just aspirants to different careers. The availability of careers education exercises might be better advertised, and students needing help to formulate a career-search strategy could be assisted initially by careers information staff. This would also provide the human contact and psychological bolstering which many students appear to need. However, encouraging self-help should extend to the job-seeking stage. It should also emphasize the importance of "self-information" promotional to interview skills, and the need for employer knowledge, a shortcoming with many students.

Employers need information which Careers Advisory Services could provide. They need better awareness of what mature graduates can offer, and not recruit only applicants under twenty-five or thirty. Firms should be discouraged from targeting only prestigious academic institutions, thereby certainly missing good potential applicants, as well as prohibiting opportunities to some good students.

Client data kept by some Services seemed excessive. The best systems seemed those employing codes enabling rapid updating. Few Services, however, appeared to have questioned the need for records. By contrast, there was an emphatic need for more accurate statistics than normally obtained through the end-of-year first destination survey - misleading because undertaken too early. Evidence collected a year after graduation much more accurately reflected placement trends, and should be more widely regarded as standard statistics.

Re-appraisal of two significant groups is important. Many organisations need to revise their concept of graduates. By airing their opinions on such topics as careers literature and selection methods, students themselves may have a constructive role to play in this. Services should reconsider the role and potential of information staff. Greater recognition and responsibilities should be accorded them, consistent with the notion of information being an integral part of the guidance process.

Despite the needs for these major improvements, there are some encouraging trends. One is the growing appreciation of careers education as a legitimate goal for Higher Education. Another is the recognition that careers information may be imparted through learning situations such as work experience. These approaches are being adopted by traditionally academic departments as well as within applied sciences and other vocational courses where they are longer-established. The activities themselves reveal to students significant features of particular work environments, and help accustom them to norms of working life in general. They seem likely to encourage open-mindedness among students as to what they may do on graduating.

There has been an expansion in the range of graduate-level jobs. This is occurring not only with new jobs emerging within established occupations, but in the opening-up of 'alternative' lines of work, such as those related to environmental conservation, fringe medicine, whole-food production, charities and pressure groups. Considering the gravity of the problems which such organisations deal with, the traditional professions may in time detect a haemorrage of graduates into such work.

The enthusiasm for technological aids to guidance, spurred perhaps more by fashion than reason in recent years, is being tempered.

It is now recognised that database information may assist, but not supplant, the guidance process, and that the limited use such facilities afford prevent their seriously rivalling conventional information sources.

Careers information officers are taking initiatives to raise their own prestige. Higher salaries reflecting their skills might lead to their being regarded as professionals. This might in turn encourage Service directors to allow them more contact with students, to whom their knowledge could be very helpful. Typically lone figures within their own Services, information officers would find their cause speeded through active involvement of directors. Establishing a recognised careers information qualification, for example, is something in which they could be instrumental.

Perhaps the single most encouraging move towards successful future careers information provision has been Services' formal scrutiny of their own practices on a regular basis, and their seeming willingness to implement changes based on findings. This is essential to a correlation between needs and provision.

Promising research topics for future investigation might include:

1) The careers information-seeking habits of students.
2) The influence of recruitment literature.
3) Careers advisers' use of information in the guidance process.
4) Why information is still often regarded as ancillary to careers guidance and/or education.
5) Student receptivity to different kinds of careers information.
6) What advance knowledge newly-employed graduates would retrospectively have liked about their jobs.

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APPENDIX

THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Questionnaire Number
(For research purposes only) ☐

Careers Information Questionnaire

Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability. Do not feel obliged to answer them all at one sitting, and please feel free to consult colleagues or records if you wish.

Question 1 - The Clients

(Where appropriate, please tick the relevant box)

a) In your estimation, which academic year-group uses the Careers Advisory Service most?

1st Year ☐ 2nd Year ☐ 3rd/4th Year ☐ Postgraduate students ☐

b) Do most students using the Service:

(i) Seek to help themselves ☐ (ii) Seek assistance ☐

c) In your experience, what is the average client's level of careers knowledge?

Very poor ☐ Patchy ☐ Reasonable ☐ Good ☐ Excellent ☐

d) Which academic year-group uses the Careers Advisory Service least?

1st Year ☐ 2nd Year ☐ 3rd/4th Year ☐ Postgraduate students ☐

e) Can you think of any aspect of the Careers Advisory Service which might discourage student use?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If 'Yes', please say what this is.

.....

.....

.....

f) Has the Service recently made any analysis of its role and provision?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If 'Yes', has this resulted in any significant changes?

.....

.....

If 'No', is there any particular reason why no analysis has been made?

.....

.....

Question 2 - Clients' Needs

a) How appropriate are most clients' requests in relation to what advisors consider their real needs?

Very relevant ☐ Fairly relevant ☐ Partially relevant ☐

Barely relevant ☐

b) Do most clients' declared needs relate to:

(i) Information ☐ (ii) Self-awareness ☐

c) Do you feel that students should obtain basic careers information before consulting a Careers Officer?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If 'Yes', do most students in fact do this?

Yes ☐ No ☐

d) What proportion of enquiries received are not really the province of the Careers Advisory Service?

Under 5% ☐ 5-10% ☐ 10-15% ☐ 15-20% ☐ Over 20% ☐

e) Do clients generally follow advice to consult sources beyond the Careers Advisory Service?

Yes ☐ No ☐

f) What proportion of clients request information on self-presentation (e.g. form-filling and interview skills)?

Under 5% ☐ 5-10% ☐ 10-20% ☐ 20-30% ☐ Over 30% ☐

g) Is information available for handicapped students?

Yes ☐ No ☐

h) Do you feel that your Service meets the information needs of adult students?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If 'No', please say why you feel this.

.....

.....

Question 3 - Information Materials

a) Does the Careers Advisory Service have a separate information room or browsing area for clients?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If 'No', where is information made available?

.....

.....

b) In seeking information do most students appear to:

(i) Find what they want ☐ or (ii) Need help ☐

c) Is a photocopier available to clients?

Yes ☐ No ☐

d) Are any audio-visual or computer information aids available to students?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If 'Yes', please give details.

.....

.....

e) Does your Service produce any careers materials of its own?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If 'Yes', please say what these are.

.....

.....

f) Can students borrow careers information?

Yes ☐ No ☐

g) Is a client contact record system kept?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If 'Yes', please say briefly what form it takes, including any documentation involved.

.....

.....

.....

Question 4 - Arrangement and Replenishment of Materials

a) Is information arranged mainly:

(i) To conform to an established coding system ☐

(ii) To conserve space ☐

(iii) To attract clients ☐

(iv) To facilitate use ☐

(v) To encourage item return ☐

Please tick more than one of the above boxes if you think it appropriate.

b) Is the Careers information stock review:

(i) Ongoing ☐ or (ii) Periodic ☐

c) Is stock replenishment:

(i) Automatic ☐ or (ii) Dependent on usage ☐

d) At what age are most occupational leaflets/booklets considered obsolete?

Under 1 year ☐ 1-2 years ☐ 2-3 years ☐

3-5 years ☐ Over 5 years ☐

e) Are material ordering systems:

(i) Speedy Yes ☐ No ☐

(ii) Reliable Yes ☐ No ☐

If 'No' to either, can you suggest any explanation for this?

.....

.....

Question 5 - Staff and their Needs

a) How many Careers Advisors are in your Service? .....

b) Is anyone exclusively or mainly responsible for Careers Information, (i.e. books, leaflets, etc.)?

.....

c) Is a member of staff always available to answer information requests?

Yes ☐ No ☐

d) Are Careers Advisors expected to:

(i) Be knowledgeable across the full range of graduate occupations ☐

(ii) Be especially conversant with a specific occupational field ☐

d) (continued)

Do any problems arise from this?

.....

.....

Are there any important advantages?

.....

.....

e) Are information sessions run for staff, or are they expected to keep up-to-date themselves?

.....

f) What level of understanding of any particular occupation is an advisor expected to have?

Very basic facts ☐ A good range of facts ☐

Good factual and lifestyle information ☐ Very detailed information and understanding ☐

g) Are students expected to obtain careers information or supply information about themselves in advance of an appointment?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If 'Yes', what sort of information?

.....

.....

h) Are client interview records kept?

Yes ☐ No ☐

How useful to you think these are?

.....

.....

.....

Question 6 - Liaison with Faculties or Departments

a) Does the Careers Advisory Service have regular contact with any Faculties or Departments?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If 'Yes', please say briefly what this consists of:

.....

.....

.....

b) Do any particular Faculties/Departments react well to liaison?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If 'Yes', please say which.

.....

.....

c) Is it your impression that departmental staff are knowledgeable about work opportunities relating to their field?

Yes ☐ No ☐

d) Has the Service experienced any resistance to its ideas by Faculties or Departments?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If 'Yes', are you prepared to say what this is?

.....

.....

Question 7 - Visitors

a) Does the Careers Advisory Service offer a programme of talks by invited speakers?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If 'Yes', please indicate briefly the range of such talks and the format they take.

.....

.....

b) What is the average attendance at such talks?

10-20 ☐ 20-40 ☐ 40-70 ☐ 70-100 ☐ Over 100 ☐

c) Do most talks prompt questions and discussion?

Yes ☐ No ☐

d) In information terms, how useful is the 'Milk Round' and/or any other student canvass by employers?

.....

.....

.....

Question 8 - Finance

a) How much money is available annually to fulfil information needs (e.g. buy literature, new computer systems, etc.)?

£200-500 ☐ £500-1000 ☐ £1,000-1,500 ☐ £1,500-2,000 ☐

Over £2,000 ☐

b) Is the Service able to obtain all the information resources it needs?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If 'No', what does it have to forego?

.....

.....

c) Are sources of free material utilised?

Yes ☐ No ☐

Please say what these are:

.....

.....

d) Are staff formally consulted before spending decisions relating to information are made?

Yes ☐ No ☐

Question 9 - The Information Calendar

a) With regard to information, what are the busiest times of year for the Careers Advisory Service?

.....

.....

b) Do the demands at these times affect what the Service can do in other respects?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If 'Yes', please say what these effects are.

.....

.....

Any other Comments

Please add here any further observations you would like to make on the informational aspect of your Service's work.

Thank you very much for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. Be assured that your answers will be treated confidentially. Please return it to me in the enclosed stamped, addressed envelope.

Paul Greer.